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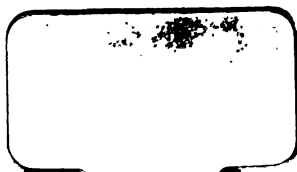


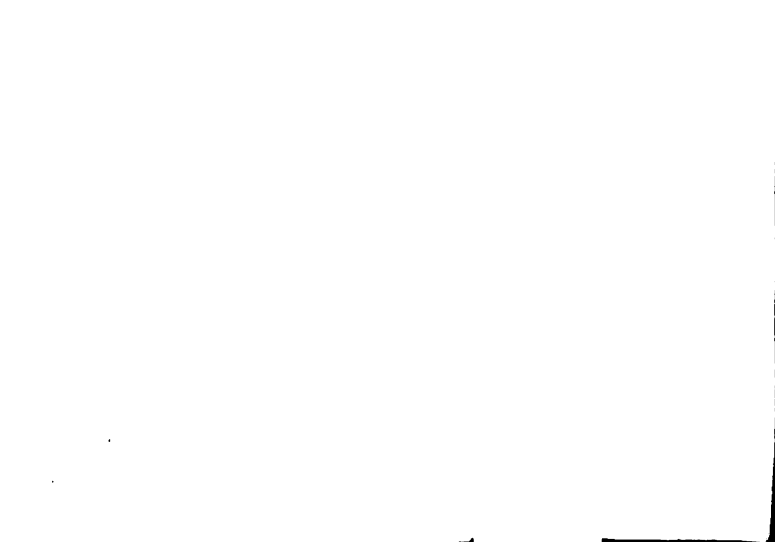


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STUBBLE FARM.

STUBBLE FARM;

OR,

Three Generations of English Farmers.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"ERNEST STRUGGLES;

OR,

THE COMIC INCIDENTS AND ANXIOUS MOMENTS IN CONNECTION WITH THE

LIFE OF A STATION-MASTER."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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PREFACE.

How sadly we part with the good old times and customs; how often we refer to them; and how willingly we all relate to the little ones on our knees and around us how it was when *we* were boys.

The march of trade and commerce has in 1879 laid its axe at the root of the dearest old ivy-clad oak in the forest, viz. English Agriculture, and has doomed it to fall from its old growth, and be planted anew on a fresh soil, unencumbered with its old ivy surroundings, and for the most part in a foreign land.

But there is so much that is interesting associated with the old parent stem, that I invite my readers to take with me one last look under the ivy, one more swing in the old tree, one more picnic at its foot, a peep into one more bird's-nest on its branches. I

would pick up one more bushel of acorns, pluck one more oak-apple, catch one more rabbit from beneath its stool, have one more shooting-luncheon in its shade, pour out the beer for one more hay-making party, cut my name for the last time on its trunk, and then—— Good-bye, dearest of old institutions ! See, here comes Mr. Gladstone with his sharpened axe—*Progress !*

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STUBBLE FARM.

CHAPTER I.

Harry Radford's Home—Thomas Strong's Homestead—
Jemmy the Cowman and his Pets.

IN the county of Brakeshire, betwixt two large woods divided only by a narrow parish roadway, stood two thatched cottages. They had been built on a piece of waste land which had become the property of Squire Fairplay the landlord, owing to an Enclosures Act, and their little wooden gates opened on to the roadway. Although semi-detached and exactly alike in their architecture, a moment's pause at the entrance sufficed to strike an ob-

servant visitor with their dissimilitude, for the surroundings were entirely different. In the one garden was a good stack of dry wood for the winter's consumption, a pigstye with a goodly grunter therein, a stack of dried fern and rushes to make his bed with from time to time, and in another corner a large stool with four beehives. All round the garden was a wire-netted fence to keep the rabbits and hares from paying nocturnal visits to the garden produce, and the garden, nay even the walls of the cottage, abounded with newly-budded roses and wall-fruit. The other cottage was a complete blank—no pig, no straw, no wood, no trees, and the few cabbages that had been planted were gnawed down to the stumps by the rabbits and hares, whose entrance was not barred by the post-and-rail fencing of the garden. Even the windows were devoid of curtains.

In this latter cottage sat one day a woman of about twenty-seven years of age, crouching over a fire of tree-roots, which smouldered on

the hearth, Mrs. Radford, the wife of Tom Radford, the tenant of the cottage. Her attention was at last attracted by the raising of the latch of the cottage-door and the entrance of her little son Harry Radford, a child of seven years of age.

Harry Radford was the only son of Tom and Emma Radford, and had that day been with his father to the farm of Thomas Strong to help in twisting the bands with which his father tied hay for his employer.

"Where's your father, Harry?" said Mrs. Radford.

"I left un at the Red Bull," replied the boy, as he nestled on a little stool close to his mother.

"How long has he been there?" inquired the mother.

"We left off about five, mother, and was a-coming straight home, only we met Farmer Strong, and father drawed ten shillings on account, an' then he went to the Red Bull."

"Why," exclaimed Mrs. Radford, "it was only last night he declared he'd never go to the Red Bull again. He said old Dick Reed the landlord was a humbug, and he'd turned it all up."

"Ah mother," put in Harry, "that was cos Dick Reed wouldn't let him have no more beer. He had scored up ten shillings, and they wouldn't draw him another pint till that was paid."

"And did he take that ten shillings to Dick Reed?"

"Yes, mother, and paid it all off; and now he can go on again. He treated all as was in the tap-room, and I left him singing to them. He wouldn't come home, and told me to come and fetch you."

"Me!" said Mrs. Radford. "Not me; I sha'n't go a yard after him. I've been on that errand once too often. Why, before I'd been there half-an-hour he would be jealous of some other man. There would sure to be a fight, and very likely the constable sent for before it was over."

"Why don't you blow the fire, mother?" said little Harry.

"Cos the bellows is broke, and there ain't no money to mend them with."

"Mother, cut me a bit of bread."

"There ain't none, my child. The baker wouldn't leave none, and I haven't sent the loaf back that I borrowed next door; and there's your father treating everybody up at the Red Bull. Oh dear, oh dear! I wish I'd never set eyes on him."

"Then," said Harry, "you wouldn't have had me."

"No more I should, my pretty dear;" and the two nestled together over the smoking heap of wet roots that were piled on the fireplace, whilst the woman's sobs broke the silence of the solitude.

"Hark, mother! What's that?" said Harry.

"Nothing, my child."

"I knows better; and it's our old Tib at the window," and so saying the little fellow climbed

into a chair and opened the casement, which admitted a fine black cat. Tib immediately jumped into his mistress's lap, and, having stroked her chin backwards and forwards several times with his tail, he next proceeded to greet the little boy in the same manner, after which he went to the door and commenced to cry.

"One would think you'd had enough of this night," said Mrs. Radford, "without wanting to go out again." And as Tib kept repeating his "Meaw, meaw," she continued: "What ails the cat to-night?"

"P'r'aps he's got summut outside," said Harry: "I'll let him out."

Harry then proceeded, with the aid of his hoopstick, to open the latch of the door, and Tib disappeared as he did so.

"Poor cat," said Mrs. Radford, "he can't find any supper here, so he is off to catch one for himself in the woods. Some of these nights the keepers will trap him." But Tib soon disproved her surmise, for he returned through the

door triumphantly carrying a fine warm rabbit.

"Well done, Tib!" said Mrs. Radford.

"Didn't I tell you, mother, very likely he'd got summut outside?"

Then both stroked the cat, and Mrs. Radford soon skinned the rabbit and popped it into the pot to boil for supper.

"Harry," said his mother, "you go in next door and ask Mrs. Hodge if she would like a little bit of boiled rabbit for her child's supper that has been ill, and then ask her to lend us half a loaf of bread."

Harry soon returned with a satisfactory answer, and thus the cat provided the supper, and sat in Tom Radford's chair when it was served; whilst Tom himself was trying to arrive home by continually describing the letter S in his passage from one side of the road to the other, for he was drunk. By the time he did arrive all trace of the supper had been removed, and the remainder of the boiled rabbit had been placed in a basin ready for the morrow's dinner.

At five o'clock the next morning Tom Radford was stirring, and by six o'clock himself, wife, and little Harry were on the way to Farmer Strong's to tie hay that was ordered. "For," said Tom, "the boy isn't strong enough to wind the bands straight, and they break."

'Twas scarcely daylight as they turned the corner of the road which led to Stubble Farm, but already the farmer and his men were astir. It was in the month of November, and Farmer Strong and his carters were on their road to sow a portion of the wheat-crop for the coming year. Twelve fine cart-horses, for the most part mottled or iron-gray, were walking two-and-two with their chain traces dangling at their flanks, and three little carter boys with large whips had each four of the horses in charge. Each horse had a well-filled nose-bag, containing chaff and corn, hanging to the hames on his collar, and two burly carters brought up the rear. Tom Strong the farmer was leading a stout cob which was drawing a cart laden with seed-wheat

and two seed-lips. One of the carters took charge of the cob, and the farmer, thus relieved, proceeded to the back of the cart, where he found a bundle of wheat-straw, and handing that to John the head-carter, he tucked a loaded double-barrelled gun under his left arm, and said: "Come on, John, we shall walk faster than them—we will go and get some marked out." As the two men thus walked on ahead of the horses, it was questionable as to which was the finer man of the two. Mr. Strong was dressed after the fashion of the best farmers of the day. He wore knee-breeches, gaiters, boots tightly laced, and a velvet shooting-jacket, whilst his carter, John Lingwood, was dressed in a smock-frock and knee-breeches. There was, however, an awkward swing about the gait of the carter, which, together with a very large foot and thick ankle, distinguished man from master; but they were both tall sturdy men.

"Look, master!" said John. "Do you see that old fox crawling along by yon hedge

towards the cover — what has he got on his back ? ”

“ I’ll make him drop that,” said Tom Strong, and he commenced to run across the field in an opposite direction, to cut off Reynard’s retreat. For a long time this manœuvre was not noticed by the fox, but as the farmer appeared from a deep ditch under the boundary of the cover, the fox paused, looked deliberately at the farmer, and was evidently considering what was best to be done. At his rear was John Lingwood, and in front of him was Tom Strong the farmer, whilst on his back was his burden, the head of which he carried in his mouth, and which it was necessary should arrive in safety in the wood before him. It was true that no one was within five hundred yards of him at present, and a broad expanse of wood was stretched in front of him ready for his ingress. After a short halt he decided on his point of entering the wood, and, flourishing his fine old brush as a signal of defiance, gave his burden a fresh throw to tighten

his grip on it, and made for the wood as if hounds were after him. Tom Strong shouted with all his might, and ran as if to cut off his retreat, hoping he would drop his booty, but to no effect, and it became evident that the fox would reach the wood in safety at from eighty to one hundred yards ahead of his pursuer.

Now, Tom Strong would not have shot a fox for any money. He was too fond of the sport of hunting him, but he knew full well that the sound of the report of the gun would frighten the fox ; so, after a final shout, he shouldered his gun and fired in the air, and as the report ran through the coverts, the booty was dropped, and the fox scampered into the wood. And a fine booty it was, for it was a beautiful hen-turkey, which he had secured from a neighbouring farm, to regale on at his leisure.

John Lingwood said : " If you'll give her to me, master, I'll eat her ; for what's the odds if a turkey's killed with a knife or by a fox ? " So the turkey was handed over to John, who

finely enjoyed the joke at the expense of the fox, and he set about in right earnest to mark out the drifts for casting the seed, by means of the straw, whilst his master distributed the sacks of wheat at the ends of the lands, in the hedgerows, in readiness to fill therefrom their seed-lips as they walked to and fro to scatter seed on good ground.

And truly it was good ground, for Tom Strong was a good farmer. It had been clover, and was what was termed a "clover lay," that is to say, the clover had been mown once only for hay, then penned with sheep, manured with well-rotted stable manure, and finally ploughed and pressed with a three-wheeled heavy iron presser, to tighten the ground between the furrows, and to press into the earth all that was green. So true was the ploughing that each wheel-mark of the presser formed a little straight drill wherein the seed fell as it was afterwards cast by the two powerful men, who delivered each handful with a will and a force, keeping the elbow level with the shoulder,

and well opening the fingers as they cast, so as to distribute regularly the goodly plump corns, selected and changed with a farmer from afar, whose land was of a different nature, and which corn had been previously sprinkled and mixed with vitriol and water to give the grubs and the smut a warning to keep off. Three horses were tied to four harrows, and very soon the whole twelve were in motion, harrowing in the corn that had been sown by the two seedsmen.

"Now, John," said the farmer, "we have set them well going. Let you and I go to the cart, for there is some bread and fat bacon, and some home-brewed ale in the basket."

It would have done good to the eyes of some epicures to see quite two pounds of solid fat bacon disappear, and after one lasting draught at the mouth of his especial wooden bottle, the farmer announced to his head-carter that he felt better, and able to assist with the remaining sowing of twelve acres.

"Here, Joe," said he to the other carter, "this

bottle of beer is for you and your boys. Give the lands two tine with the harrows as you follow, so as to cover the seed from the birds, then four tine the same way, and lastly two tine crossways ; for to-morrow you must all come without the harrows and tread it up and down to press it in tight, for it is light land and full of wire-worms. The hounds meet here to-morrow, and when you are riding up and down, tell the boys to stick tight to their horses, for I expect the horses are so fresh that they will squeak and kick when they see the hounds and horses ; but stick tight to their heads for awhile, for I am going to take my gun along under a sack to have a pop at those old rooks which are devouring our corn in yon far corner. If I pretend to be sowing, stripped out in my shirt-sleeves, they will be taken in for once, I'll be bound."

Thus occupied, we will leave a real specimen of the true English farmer, in days before railways were made, while we step to his farm to survey his stock and his homestead.

A row of sixteen elm trees stood to the north of the entrance, as if to break the force of the wind, and beneath their bank was constructed a long yard of thatched hurdles, in readiness for a flock of two hundred ewes to take shelter during the lambing time.

Little Harry Radford was bearing a can of beer from the Red Bull to his father and mother, who were busily engaged tying clover hay from the rick into nice trusses of fifty-six pounds each, bound with white straw and weighed with the steelyards. The broad clover hay had been gathered in first-rate order, taken a good heat, and from a little distance it looked like beautiful bunches of pressed raisins, for truly it had such a nice gloss. Tom Radford took a huge "quid" of tobacco from his mouth, had a long pull at the beer, spat in his hands, replaced the tobacco in his mouth, sharpened his cutting-knife with a rubber, placed two straw-bands on the ground (one end of each being tucked under the bands of a truss of hay already tied, the other ends being

kept from untwisting by the pressure of two bricks which were laid on them), and he ran up the ladder with the agility of a builder, to cut out another truss of hay, which he then bore down on his head (descending the ladder backwards), to tie, weigh, and place it with the large heap that was waiting to be loaded on the waggon which would be coming that day for four tons of Tom Strong's best clover hay, at four pounds per ton. Nine more hay-ricks of various descriptions stood in a row, all of which had been thatched, trimmed, and tucked by Tom Radford, and on the middle one he had erected a weathercock made of straw, which turned with the wind, and was admired by little Harry as a specimen of his father's handiwork. Eight wheat-ricks, after the shape of an inverted peg-top, stood on stone staddles in a row (the staddles all being capped with a stone shaped like a cheese, to prevent the mice and rats from climbing into the corn, where they would otherwise breed and accumulate with alarming arithmetical progression), and the stack-yard was otherwise completely crowded with

stacks of oats, barley, and beans, all of which would be thrashed in due course to provide money for rent, bills, and provisions, whilst the straw, chaff, and pickings would be muzzled by the cattle in the yards, and trodden into manure.

"Hulloah Jack!" exclaimed Tom Radford from the top of the stack, as he paused cutting for a moment, "what, are you going to help harrow the wheat in?"

"Yes," said Jack; "master said I was to take the chestnut mare and Woolly Boy up when I had cleaned all the tackle and helped indoors, but they are just about fresh, I shall have all my work to hold them, I know. Master's going to ride Woolly Boy with the hounds to-morrow, and there's a trotting match coming off with the mare in a week's time, so I mustn't take too much out of them. But I must get along, or he'll blow up like billyho. I say, Tom, before you leave off, just tie us up a couple of trusses out of the middle there, and shove a bit of straw over them, my horses don't much care

for the meadow hay;" and Jack the nagman went whistling on his way to the tune of "And he was a young fellow that followed the plough."

Once you got fairly into the homestead of Stubble Farm, such farm comfort met your eye as was pleasing beyond measure. The farm buildings formed three sides of a square, with a very large straw-yard in the centre, whilst the farmhouse with trees and a grass-plat formed the fourth side, with its large vegetable-and-flower garden and its pretty summer-house at the rear. Every part of that enclosure was entirely surrounded with stacks of corn, hay, straw, wood, hurdles, or fencing, and every foot of the ground was covered with habitations of animals, even the roofings of the barns were covered with pigeons, sparrows, and starlings.

"Ya orapit, ya orrell, orell, orell!" says the fine old Tom Turkey as you advance, and he droops his large wings, rouges his head, swells and extends his feathers, and looks at you as if

he would burst at you like a bombshell, for he knows you are a stranger, whilst his three hens are modestly inquiring of him all the while for "chalk, chalk, chalk!"

"Ba—gone!" says the peacock, in a loud shrill voice, which seems to go through both ears twice before he has completed the sentence, and as he completes it he springs to one of the yard-gates to show you his lovely court-train, and for fear you should fail to notice it he sounds a sharp musical note like a blast on a cracked trumpet.

"Go back, go back, go back, go back!" say the peafowls, apparently annoyed at your intrusion, and their voice grates on your ear like the sharpening of a saw, until they make a tremendous chatter and then fly up in a body as if they were all off to Australia.

"Wow, wow, wow—araforow, bow, wow!" is heard all over the farm; and very soon Bingo, the black-and-white spaniel, appears from the house and greets you with a tremendous fit of barking. You may thank your lucky stars that

none of the large dogs are loose, or they would follow Bingo, and probably claim a closer acquaintance with your nether garments.

“Missus, is master here?” says a fine farm-yard cock, as he sits on the top of a cow-rack. But before we introduce you to Mrs. Strong, let me tell you who comes this way—it is Jemmy the cowman. Now, Jemmy the cowman carries more responsibility under that smock-frock and top hat than my readers are aware of. He will insist on wearing a top hat—no deerstalkers for Jemmy, he was never known to wear a Dudley, and summer or winter, blow or shine, Jemmy Wooten wears a top hat. Not one idle moment has Jemmy, and when you have spent one morning with him you will say to yourself: “What would become of Stubble Farm if Jemmy was taken ill, for no one could possibly learn his variety of duties?” Let us proceed to spend that one morning with Jemmy the cowman, for not only shall we become acquainted with Jemmy and his duties, but we shall know most of the

animals that draw breath at Tom Strong's chief homestead.

Jemmy, you must know, is managing director. He has the keys of the granaries, the keys of the cornbins. He keeps the key of the oilcake, the malt-dust, even the barns and the lockups therein.

At four o'clock in the morning Jemmy is astir with the carters, and he at once proceeds to attend to his early department—this consists of a horse, for the most part an old one, and a donkey. Old Blackbird is now the name of Jemmy's horse, and you can hear him neigh as he hears Jemmy's hob-nailed boots coming along the stones with Jemmy and a lantern. "Ulloah, old fellow," says Jemmy, "ready for your breakfast? what, got your leg over the halter?" and Jemmy lifts Blackbird's leg over the halter again, gathers a handful of straw from his bed, sweeps his manger out, and then having suspended the lantern Jemmy goes to a cornbin, where he finds a sieve, then he dives into one portion of the bin with the sieve, and having produced a sieveful of chaff, Jemmy pro-

ceeds to sift the dust on to the ground, whilst the old horse neighs impatiently for his corn, which Jemmy has placed on the chaff preparatory to stirring it all up together in his manger.

Ye-haw, haw, e-haw, e-or, haw, haw, hor! says the donkey, impatient that Blackbird should be first waited on; and Jemmy calls out: "Stop that, Jenny, I'll bring you some carrots directly." Jemmy then gropes under some straw and fills his sieve with fine carrots, into which Jenny's sharp teeth are soon heard to munch.

The next task is to groom Blackbird for the day, and as Jemmy completes this task, amid a shower of dust, old Blackbird switches his tail and smiles at his groom,¹ pretending to bite him.

"There, old boy," says Jemmy, as he gives him a further sievelful of corn-and-chaff, "make haste and eat it up, for the shepherd will be after you directly to take a load of food up to the sheep;" and having given an armful of hay to the horse and the donkey, Jemmy has fed two

of his animals, and trots off to the cowstall. As he closes the door on entering, a general rush is made from the yard, and twelve spotted cows all anxiously run to the entrance ; a cow's whisper is heard from all of them as they patiently wait for the reopening of the door. But what is Jemmy doing inside? Why, he is filling a long row of mangers with barley-and-oat chaff, and half-a-bushel of cut swedes is placed for each cow behind the two upright posts betwixt which the head of each cow is secured whilst she feeds and is sucked and milked. Jemmy has filled the twelve stalls. See, he picks up a green willow stick and opens the cowstall door. "Gently, gently, gently," says Jemmy, as the cows rush to get in, and he holds the stick up to make them obey. "Wo, Strawberry! wo, York! steady, Dangerous! wo, Spot! come along, Dun! wo, Docile! wo, Buttercup! cup Jersey! now then, Spiteful, as one cow tries to poke another one with her horn, and the twelve cows all go to their allotted stalls, and Jemmy is busy

closing the wooden fastenings over their heads, whilst they are consuming the cut swedes and chaff. But see, there are still three cows in the yard, how is it they do not try to come in too? Why, they are not giving milk, and they have no right to any swedes; but see, Jemmy has not forgotten them, for he has taken them a good bundle of hay, and is placing it in their cow-racks. See, too, there is a little bull capering behind Jemmy all the while he is doing it. "You young rascal," says Jemmy, as he turns round and finds the bull shaking his head close to his back, "if you don't mind what you're at I'll take you in and tie you up along side of your father; but he'll soon be off to the butcher, and you may as well run about till he's gone, if you behave decent." "Bor, bor!" says the young bull, and with his tail up he capers round the yard whilst Jemmy shakes his frock at him and claps his hands. Jemmy's voice is a signal for a sudden apparition. From beneath the cow-racks appear full twenty-five fine young store hogs, which

follow and squeak at his heels until he goes to the granary, lowers the steps, and returns with a gallon of beans, which he scatters on the dung-mine midst the straw and the dung as if he were sowing them in a field. "There, you noisy crew," said Jemmy, "there's a job for you;" and they all set to work to find and crack the beans, which will occupy them until their breakfast is ready. Jemmy next fetches his yoke, and proceeds with two large pails to the back-door of the house, to call up the servants, and to remove two pails of waste wash, the trimmings, washings, and scrapings from the previous day's cooking and cleaning of dishes. With a pole he taps at the window, and then toddles off with the pails across the yard to the hog-house, to deposit the contents of the pails in one of two large cisterns which are sunk in the ground. He then carries ten pails of water from the pump to each cistern, shoots pollard from a sack into one, and barley-meal from another sack into the other, stirs both up

with a wooden jet with a long handle, and closes the door.

"Now then, Nipper," says Jemmy to a boy who appears, "you're late again. Why don't you lay a-bed all day? It's been gone six o'clock this five minutes. If you can't get here to time I shall tell the master of you, and he'll put that ground-ash stick round you. That'll fetch you here, I'll back. Now then, go round and see if them gals is up; and take this pail with you and bring that drop of pot-liquor that stands in a pot by the back-door, to mix the dogs' food with."

Nipper obeys, and Jemmy proceeds to the cowstall preparatory to suckling the calves, one of the chief events of the morning. As he enters the calf-pen it is so dark he can see nothing, so he lowers the wooden shutter to admit daylight. The calf-pen contains sixteen fattening calves, of all colours and sizes, and all clean as a pink; they have the best of wheat-straw to lie on, and a nice warm place to be in. At the end of the

pen is a beautiful white fat calf. It is his last morning at Stubble Farm, for the butcher is coming for him. He will never see his mother after to-day, and as Jemmy places a little halter on his head and unbuckles his collar, he hands him over to Nipper, pats the calf on his back, and says :

“There, go, old boy, and have your last breakfast.”

And what a breakfast he makes! He sucks every drop that his beautiful mother, Strawberry, gives, whilst the froth drops from his mouth, and during the operation his mother is licking any part of her calf that comes within her reach. Then he is untied from her tail, to which his head had been tied—(a handful of straw was placed round her tail to prevent the cord hurting the tail)—and is tied to the next cow, which he sucks until he cannot find room for another drop ; and then he is led back panting and puffing to his straw bed, which has been shaken and replenished with straw for the last time by Jemmy.

To-morrow his mother will bellow when she misses him, and for three days she will refuse to give her milk down, and kick at the red calf which has to take his place, until he too has to go to the butcher. Some calves there are which have one cow to themselves, some half a one; and when all have had their allotted quantum, and you would think there was nothing left, Jemmy calls out to the boy: "Now then, let the drippers out;" and he opens a pen from whence issue four calves, very young and very lean, to suck every drop where they find any left. Theirs is indeed a rough task, and they get kicks no end as they try first one cow and then the other; but their perseverance is only exceeded by their appetites, and when they are dragged back to their pens they don't seem to have had half enough, and they suck each other's ears as if they were starving. But to-morrow one of the drippers will be chained up and luxuriate in half a cow's milk for a meal, and a new calf will be purchased from a calf-cart and become a dripper

until its stomach is used to good milk; for, as Jemmy says: "They have terrible tender stimicks at first, and if they had what they wanted they would die in a week with the scour."

"Bring my stool and the can," calls out Jemmy, "for there's the cats, dogs, and ferrets to feed, and a drop of milk makes their food better, whilst it only brings cores in the cows if it's left in their udders."

One would think such an attempt would be useless; but despite the frantic efforts of the drippers, Jemmy found quite a quart of new milk which the cows had refused to give down to the drippers; and simultaneously with its rattling into his can, forthwith appeared cats and kittens, which rubbed their tails round Jemmy's stool as if to ask for their breakfast.

In a hutch in one corner were also two pink-eyed white ferrets, which rubbed their noses against the bars of their cage and said: "Puzzle, puzzle, puzzle!" until Jemmy gave them half-a-pint of nice milk; whilst the cats lapped the same

quantity from an inverted pot-lid placed on the ground.

Jemmy's next task was to milk the Alderney cow called Jersey, which had an enclosed stall to herself; then, having ascertained that the boy had replenished the calves' trough with pounded chalk for them to lick, he sent him in with the milk, and unstalled the cows.

"Here, take this pail and bring a drop of hot water to mix the dogs' grub," he called to the boy; and then Jemmy procured a gallon of barley-meal, a little chopped greaves, the pot-liquor before mentioned, a pint of the milk he had left; and he stirred a goodly mixture, to be thinned with hot water which he took from the boy. Having directed the boy to go and break the ice in the water-troughs, and pump them all full of water, he went on his round to feed all the dogs. "Bold Neptune, my boy—cess, boy, cess!" and he filled a small trough for a large black retriever while the dog wagged his tail with evident satisfaction. "Now, Pincher, my

boy," and a red terrier showed his teeth at a second kennel in another direction as he received his morning allowance.

Then there were three greyhounds in a loose box, but they received a very small allowance, for said Jemmy to them: "If the frost goes it's very likely you'll be wanted to catch a hare or two, and you can't run on a full stomach." Next Sancho the pointer, and lastly a spare spaniel and a sheep-dog puppy were fed.

"Now then, haven't you pumped that water yet? There's the bull, and the pigs, and the store things to do yet. We sha'n't get done in time for breakfast. Come along, do!" and once more Jemmy and his boy trot off to another yard, where they fodder ten heifers with some rough hay, then they take the bull a bushel of swedes, some water and hay, and in a shed hard by they find twelve little calves that have been weaned, which have to be fed with cut swedes, hay-chaff, and some meal. Then Jemmy announces with evident satisfaction: "Now the

pigs." This time, as he opens the hog-house door, it is a signal for a general concert from all the pigs; the large pigs, in a long row of sties, place their fore-feet on the top of the sty; such a concert you never heard before. The twenty-five store pigs make a rush for Old Jemmy—for he has been called Old Jemmy by the other workmen for some time—and it is only by tremendous cuts from a long whip, administered by the boy at the full extent of his might, that they are kept from the long troughs, into which Jemmy is vigorously pouring pail after pail of the mixture from one of the wells in the hog-house.

"Come away!" says he to the boy, and now, to those who have never seen twenty-five store pigs fed, the sight would indeed be a novelty. All place their feet in the trough, and push, fight, and swallow, until they are besmeared and distended, and then one by one they creep off to the cow-racks, under which they sleep, snore, and grumble until feeding-time comes again.

Not so with the twenty fat hogs he next feeds, for they are too lazy to get up to partake of their barley-meal, and Jemmy goes round and slaps them on the back with a word of encouragement, such as: "Get up, old chap, you'll soon do for Tom Radford's knife and a bonfire; there's lots in the trough; how lazy you do get!"

All the while the pigs in the sties have been squealing for food. No. 1 sty has a sow with ten little ones, she consumes two pailfuls; No. 2 has a sow with nine pigs, who swallows a like quantity; No. 3, a nest of eleven little pigs that have been recently weaned: and they eat a pailful with a little barley-meal added to make it good; No. 4, a pair of hungry sows capable of swallowing anything they get hold of, Jemmy gives them six swedes to gnaw at and two pailfuls of thin wash; No. 5, a sow that has just produced eight little black pigs, and her food must be given warm for a day or so, when Jemmy returns from breakfast;

No. 6, a fine old boar, with tusks long enough to rip any other animal up.

"Jack, Jack, Jack!" says Jemmy; "here, boy, go and fetch that bone out of his trough, it will choke him else."

"No, I be afraid," said the boy; "he came at me yesterday."

"Then call at the blacksmith's as you go home, and tell him to come down to-morrow and break his tusks off, and tell him to bring a good strong cord to put in his mouth, or perhaps he will be doing some mischief."

"Now then," said Jemmy, "you go and have your breakfast, and I'll have mine;" and Jemmy proceeds to the granary to "shut up shop," as he terms it; but at the door of the granary await him all the fowls of the farm, and he scatters well-nigh a bushel of grain before he yet goes to his breakfast; for Jemmy, to give him his due, was a friend to all his dependants.

And don't you think he has earned his

breakfast? I am sure you don't begrudge him a good piece of fat bacon and three cups of tea, before he again toddles off with warm water to feed the sow with eight little pigs. But Jemmy has yet much to do, and as he returns to his yards he finds the shepherd waiting for the daily allowance of oilcake, and he goes in search of the boy to help grind it.

"Now then, you young gallus, what are you got at with that donkey? teasing her with a stick. If I get hold of you, I'll cut your ear off!" says he to the boy. "Presently nobody will be able to get near the donkey. I wish she'd kick you, that I do, and that would teach you better. Bring an armful of hay for old Blackbird, and come and feed the grinder whilst the shepherd crushes the cake, and look sharp."

Says the shepherd: "I've taken up a load of hay, and now I want twenty bags of chaff and the pollard and oilcake, and if you can

spare old Blackbird I want to move some hurdles."

"I must have him back by dinner-time," said Jemmy, "for I've got to bed the yards up."

Whilst they were so occupied, Jemmy found time to feed his pig, to fodder a sick horse, and to carry some bruised oats-and-chaff to two little weaning colts in a shed by themselves. Then he had a yard of rough colts to feed with hay-and-chaff, and by the time he returned the oilcake was ground, in readiness for the daily consumption of three hundred sheep which were fattening.

"Now, Nipper, put Jenny in the cart, and take five sacks of barley to the mill, and bring that meal home for the pigs which you took to be ground the last time."

"Jemmy," said the cook, "I want some potatoes, and apples, and horse-radish, and missus says, can you spare the boy to clean the stair-boards and go to the butcher's?"

"The boy's a-going to the mill, so he goes by the butcher's, and I'll bring the other things round directly I've dug the horse-radish."

"Jemmy," says the master, "just put the pony in the spring-cart and bring him round in a quarter of an hour."

"Jemmy," says the man from the chaff-house, "I want a drop of oil for my machine."

"Jemmy," says the Nipper, "here's the butcher come for the calf."

"Jemmy," says Mrs. Strong, "here's the key of the hen-house, just go and look the eggs up when the master's gone; and you'd better wash your hands and come in and rub those twelve sides of bacon, for they want turning."

"Jemmy," says the maid-servant, "I want the boy to come and turn the mangle."

And is it to be wondered that Jemmy pulled up his gaiters, scratched his head, and said :

"Drat the gal, I've got so many things to do now I don't know which way to turn."

And now we will say good-morning to Old

Jemmy, for some of his animals will soon be wanting their dinner, and the calves must be suckled again, and everything fed once or twice more before Jemmy sits in the chimney-corner in the kitchen, and nods over the wood fire.

CHAPTER II.

The Foxhounds at Stubble Farm—Ernest Strong's Accident—The Squire and his Tenant—Breaking the Boar's Tusks and Ringing the Bull.

'TWAS a lovely morning, the day after Tom Strong had sown his last twelve acres of wheat for the season; and he had just despatched twelve horses to tread in the wheat without harrows, and with instructions to give it two tine with the harrows as a final touch before they came home. Mr. Strong strode into the nag - stable to give instructions to Jack the nagman, who was busily engaged putting a final gloss to the colour of Woolly Boy's coat by means of a damp wisp of hay, whilst he hissed continually, after the manner of ostlers.

"Jack," said the farmer, "go round to Old Jemmy and tell him to give you half-a-gallon of white peas for Woolly Boy, and bring him round at ten o'clock for me to ride with the hounds, and mind there isn't a speck of dirt on him, or the saddle and bridle, and wash his frogs out, and oil his feet."

"Yes, master," said Jack.

And his master then took a walk round to see that the day labourers were all at their allotted tasks, and then a call round at the sheep-pens brought him home to a hearty eight o'clock breakfast, at which was seated his little family. Sooner or later we must become acquainted with the family, so we will proceed to describe them.

At the head of the table sat Mrs. Strong, a pleasant-looking matron scarcely past thirty years of age. Her features and manners were somewhat different to the usual type of farmers' wives, and she had an air of gentility and superiority that had the effect

of putting any visitor on his best behaviour. Opposite Mrs. Strong sat the resident governess, a dark good-looking girl, with black curls adorning her brow, and in whose charge were three children of various ages. The eldest was Harold, a lad of twelve years of age, whose features resembled his mother's, but whose hair, like his father's, was of a most decided red colour. His little sister Mary, too, scarcely four years old, bids fair to vie with him in this possession, whilst the middle child, Ernest, who was not more than seven years of age, had brown hair.

"The hounds are coming to-day, Harold," said his father; "you can tell Jack to put the saddle on the pony for you, and go with us to the cover. We are sure of a find to-day."

Harold jumped with delight, and Mrs. Strong inquired: "Where do they meet?"

"Well," said her husband, "they meet at the turnpike. But I suppose we had better have some luncheon ready in case they call round

here. I should think they would not be here before eleven o'clock, however."

Now Mrs. Strong had been schooled in polite society in London, and when by her direction the maid-servants had spread the white damask tablecloth, and set out the home-made bread, butter such as gives one an appetite, with a perfect cow on each pat, collared-head made from home-killed pigs, corned-beef, cheese of the best quality, ale to be drunk from tankards of real silver, whilst decanters of brandy, gin, port, and sherry adorned the sideboard, the luncheon formed quite a tempting repast, no matter how "great" the man who entered to partake of it. Moreover, the forks, spoons, and tongs were of real silver, and when little Ernest ran in to say: "Ma, the men in red-coats are all coming," Mrs. Strong took him by the hand and left the reception to her husband and the maid-servants:

Little Ernest looked imploringly into his mother's face and said: "Ma, let me go and see the hounds that pa sings that pretty song

about ;” but his mother said : “ No, my dear ; you must be washed and made a pretty boy first. You have made your hair quite rough, and you must have a clean pinafore on. Here, cook,” said she, calling to a stout maid, “ take Master Ernest up to Miss May in the schoolroom, and ask her to make him a clean boy and send him down. Take a jug of hot water up with you, and then she won’t have to ring for it.”

So little Ernest was marched off, although he was in pretty good order, to have an extra polish from the hands of his governess, and Mrs. Strong being called by her husband, prepared to welcome the master of the hounds, several gentlemen, a sporting doctor, a lawyer, a horse-dealer, an hotel-keeper, and one or two farmers, all of whom were reported to be on their way with the hounds and the huntsman to Stubble Farm.

The entrance of hounds, horses, and red-coats excited quite a stampede at the homestead. The peacock immediately flew to the top of the highest barn, where he sounded his most

discordant notes, and he was very soon joined by Billy the goat, who arrived at that eminence by means of a gradual ascent, having jumped out of the stable-mangers (where he was allowed to pick with the cart-horses, all of which approved of his companionship, and to whom the carter said he imparted good health) the moment the peacock announced the arrival of strangers. The peafowl flew off to the meadows. Even the turkey was afraid to gobble, and he and his mates flew on to the highest straw-rick, where they all arched their long necks and said: "Tut, tut, tut!"

Even the dogs all turned into their kennels, and Neptune the retriever, who was wont to rush at a stranger as if to tear away from his kennel, lay down like a lamb and rolled his eyes from one corner of his kennel at the hounds. The cows all rushed to the nearest gate to stare at the intruders; and first of these was poor Strawberry, who looked wildly at the hounds, as if to ask what they had done with her pretty

white calf, which was just then staggering in the butcher's pen, weak from two heavy bleedings, and too faint to call any longer for its mother, only waiting until the butcher thinks fit to bleed it again, and then put an end to its misery by making it white veal for his counter.

But see, there is one animal still anxious to know what all this commotion is about, and, too clumsy and heavy to look over his pen, he puts his nose to his doorway, and away flies the bolt, and Jack the boar-pig trots round to take stock of the strangers.

"Stop him, stop him!" cries Old Jemmy, and the whipper-in turns his horse facing the pig, and with shouts of "Eu back!" tries to stop him. But see, he takes no notice and continues his trot like a bear on the march, whilst the whipper-in gathers the thong of his hunting-whip, and winds it round him in such a manner as huntsmen can wind. Jack pauses, and planting his feet firmly on the ground he faces his foe, champs and froths with his mouth, and prepares for attack. Neither

huntsmen nor hounds will frighten him, and but for the timely arrival of Jemmy both horses and hounds would surely soon carry the marks of Jack's tusks, for he will dash right into their midst, and, battle commenced, he will fight it out to the bitter end, for the blacksmith has not yet been to break off his tusks.

"Jack, Jack, Jack," says Old Jemmy, as he rattles some beans in a half-gallon measure, "come along, do." But Jack deliberates for a moment before he abandons battle for beans—probably he is still smarting from the huntsman's whip—and then he trots off with Old Jemmy to a place of security.

As the huntsman draws his hounds up into a group on the grass-plat; he calls out: "Get back there, get back, get back, Harlequin, Drummer, Hector, Lawless, Ladybird, Sultan, Nimrod, Romulus," and he has described a complete circle, and stationed his pretty pack in a group, when into their midst, with head and tail erect, and his cart-harness rattling, dashes

old Blackbird, and he prances and blows his nose with a snort like the wild horse of the desert. "What did you let him go for, you young gallus?" said Jemmy to the Nipper, both of whom came running after old Blackbird.

"I couldn't help it. He pulled me down," cried the boy.

Much merriment was occasioned by the capers of Blackbird; even Old Jemmy was pleased to see the old horse look and act quite like a colt at the sight of the hounds.

"Don't you know him, huntsman?" inquired Farmer Strong. "Why, that's Dr. Furrell's old hunter. I bought him seven years ago at his sale, and he has worked on the farm ever since."

"Is it, now?" said the huntsman, looking admiringly at Blackbird. "Why, many's the time that old horse has been the only one in at the death besides myself, and once he came in without his rider. Take care of him, old boy,"

said he to Jemmy as he caught Blackbird, "for he's a good bit of stuff."

"Now look here, Jemmy," called his master, "if you like to put a saddle and bridle on Blackbird, I'm blowed if you shan't come along with us, for we are sure of a find to-day, and I'll bet you a new top hat he throws you at the first fence."

Jemmy made no reply, but, shaking the top hat sideways, he led Blackbird off to his stable, and the huntsman accompanied Mr. Strong to join the luncheon party.

The luncheon had been disposed of. "Just a little drop of cherry brandy all round, gentlemen, just to top up with and keep the cold out," but before Mr. Strong had got half round with it, Miss May, pale as a ghost, rushed into the room, and begged that Dr. Bowen would come immediately upstairs, for little Ernest had, during her absence, pulled a jug of boiling water over his chest, and the poor child was dreadfully scalded.

Dr. Bowen went immediately, and with a knife he had brought from the table he ripped up the poor child's shirt and vest, whilst his mother and other assistants held his arms and legs. "Send for the flour-dredge, and tear some strips of flannel for me to tie his legs and arms to the cot," said the doctor, "whilst I see the extent of the damage."

It was a sad sight to witness the agony of the poor child; and the grief of Miss May, who had for a moment left the hot water on the table, was most distressing. But soon all that could be done was completed, and having first powdered his little chest with flour, and then saturated it with oil, with instructions to let nothing touch the child's body, Dr. Bowen left Ernest stretched on his little bed to battle with death.

"It's a bad job, doctor," said the huntsman, as they trotted off side by side to draw the first cover. "It stops Mr. Strong's coming with

us, and he's a jolly good sort ; I'm very sorry. Is the little boy much injured, doctor ?"

"Every particle of skin from the child's neck to its waist came off with the clothes," replied the doctor. "I scarcely remember a worse case. It is simply a question of nature, but I think there is just a chance, for the Stronges are a fine race of people. Where would you find a more healthy and a finer man than Tom Strong ? And then look at his wife ! I should like to see the child pull through, and I shall look in presently to see him."

"Poor little blood !" said the huntsman. "Now, doctor, you go ahead to yon corner, and I'll draw the cover from this end. Yoicks, boys, yoicks, boys ; steady there, Drummer ; hark back, Lawless !" and he plunges into the covert, whilst the wood echoes with the sound of his horn, the cracking of the branches, the flight of the pheasants, and the names of the hounds. Dr. Bowen is the only rider ahead, and quietly he smokes a best havannah behind the spread-

ing oak and ivy, which screens him from all view of the hares and pheasants which escape from the huntsmen and hounds. Once the doctor moves in his saddle as a woodcock skims by him, and then all is quiet, until his famous old horse Mohawk pricks his ears, elevates his head, and attracts the attention of his master, whose mind is again in the sick-chamber. Then you see the fire return to his eye, the cigar is taken from his mouth, his hand is placed to his ear, and, as a faint rustling of the leaves and grass is heard in the wood, the doctor crouches in his saddle until Reynard has passed him, and, jumping the ditch, has bid good-bye to the wood, and is already half across the first field for the open, bidding defiance to his pursuers.

Then is heard the deep voice of a hound in the wood as Nimrod has come on the fox's late bed in the sedge, and at once Dr. Bowen wheeling about with Mohawk, and directing his voice towards the huntsman, shouts with a voice

that makes the wood ring: "Gone away, gone away, gone away!"

"Tally-ho! tally-ally-ally-ally-ali-ho! Tally-alli-alli-ali-ho!" breaks from another voice who has descried Reynard going over the second field on the hill, and now all is bustle, mettle, and excitement amidst that party of huntsmen and horses, all mad to pursue bold Reynard, that dropped the hen-turkey.

The huntsman's horn is again heard. Nimrod is loudly and repeatedly called, and 'midst the lashing of whips, and the "Yoi-yoi, yoicks, boys, yoi-yoi!" the huntsman cleverly brings his pack to the doctor, and lays them on to the scent in first-rate style, and away they go.

"Hold a minute!" says he to the impatient riders; "let 'im have grace. See how old Nimrod picks up the scent, a dog-fox I'll be bound, by the pad;" and away they all go helter-skelter, with light hearts and happy faces, and all care in the rear.

How we should like to follow them to see

how many fall at the first fence, and then to see the Bishop join in the chase, and declare he couldn't help himself, for his horse would leave the road and take him (by-the-bye, he won't buy a horse that has not been a-hunting); but we must trot back to Stubble Farm to look after Tom Strong and his troubles.

Mr. Strong is pacing his yard with Suffield the squire's gamekeeper, for he cannot bear to be in the house to hear the cries of the poor child.

"I am sorry about the little boy," says Suffield. "I wish those huntsmen would keep the other side of the water; they have driven every pheasant and hare out of the wood, and there are lots of poachers out of work, and now they have had 'a find' they will be coming again. But I hope they will kill the fox, and if I had known he had been there I would have saved them the trouble; for I want just one more skin to finish my bedroom carpet, and he must look out sharp, if they miss him, if his

isn't the skin that fills up the gap. The squire told me to come and tell you he wants to see you directly, for there's something new afloat, and he has been swearing at me all the morning. If I was him I'd forbid them the ground, but there's something new afloat, and you'd better look out for squalls, for I think it's about that blessed railway, by what the butler told me, and you know it's marked out bang across the middle of your farm, and through our best covers."

So Tom Strong took one more look at his little boy, and then trotted off to the mansion to obey the summons of his landlord.

Squire Fairplay was M.P. for the county, lord of the manor, and a large landed proprietor, and he was angrily pacing his study when Mr. Strong was announced.

"Show him up here at once," said the squire.

"Now, Strong," said he, when that gentleman appeared, "sit down—I want to talk to

you. I hear to-day from my agent in London that those railway people are determined to press for the right to cross my land. They make me a handsome offer in money, but as I have told you before, I will have neither their money nor their railway; and, as I shall have to show fight, I shall want you to go with my steward to give evidence in the House of Commons, to prove not only the uselessness of the attempt, but that it will entirely ruin my land and the tenants who may farm it. I will let you know when you will be required to attend, and you had better see Gosty my steward, who will instruct you in detail as to what evidence you are to give. This railway is a thorough Radical measure, and I will not have it. Neither will I allow anyone to set foot on my land to survey. Understand that. That is all I want of you now."

Tom Strong was about to depart, when his landlord recalled him. "Strong," said he, "I am going into the other county to-morrow with

my beagles. You know the district better than I do—meet me on the bridge at eleven o'clock to-morrow, and see if you can find me a hare."

"A little drop of old ale, sir?" said the butler, as the farmer approached the pantry. "Mr. Gosty is waiting outside for you."

Then the steward and the farmer went in the direction of the steward's house. Gosty was the taller of the two, and many years the senior of Tom Strong.

"Mr. Hale has come to see you," said Mrs. Gosty, as she opened the door.

"Just the man I want to see," replied her husband.

Mr. Hale rose to shake hands as they entered.

"Keep your hand to yourself," said Gosty, "you sneaking hound. You've been to see the squire about taking Chart Farm, I understand. What did you go to him first for? Why didn't you come to me? Now understand, if ever you

come any more of your sneaking tricks with me, I'll lead you round the market-place the very next market day by your nose. Haven't I got quite enough to do to manage the squire for you all, without your dodging about after him. I've a good mind now that you shan't have the farm, and if it wasn't that I want to add your farm to my boy Jim's, you shouldn't have it, now."

"I didn't think any harm," replied Mr. Hale, "in going direct to the fountain-head about such an important matter; but of course I don't want to displease you, and you can have my farm without any good-will, although I have a man that would give me one hundred pounds to get him in."

"Perhaps you'd like to go and tell the squire that," said Gosty; "but I'd like to catch you at it. And now we've done business, pull that rusty old coat off and sit down with Tom and me, and have a snap and a pipe, for I've a lot to talk to you both about."

Mr. Hale did not appear at all at his ease, but not wishing to further offend Squire Fairplay's land steward, he made one of the party. The subject of conversation was, of course, the forthcoming railway.

"It will be sure to come," said Gosty, "but no matter, the more the squire opposes, the more damages he will get; and as to you, Tom, you had better farm a drift of land according, for I'm told they will want an embankment past your house, which will cover up no end of land; and then a cutting up this way, and where they are going to put the stuff that comes out of the cutting nobody knows; but you will have to swear hard and fast that 'twill poison the land, and injure the trade, and ruin the county, for what will be the good of breeding horses if all the road-waggon are to be knocked off?"

Mr. Gosty's two sons joined the party in the evening, and, but for Tom Strong's anxiety as to his little boy Ernest, the usual quantum of

strong drinks and a little practice with the boxing-gloves would have wound up the evening. As it was he left early, and met Dr. Bowen, who had made a call at Stubble Farm and partaken of tea after his day's hunting.

"Well, Tom," said he, "I'm just off home; the boy is going on all right, and I think he will pull through, but we can do very little for him at present, patience and good nursing is all that can avail. We didn't kill that old fox; he gave us a splendid run for two hours, and then crossed the river twice and got clean away."

It was a sad house at Stubble Farm. Harold had taken his best knife and his pegtop to little Ernest, who smiled faintly as he laid them on his little cot, and little Mary, his sister, had cried herself to sleep, and as his mother and Miss May sat on either side of his cot each holding one of his little hands, the poor child every now and then tightened his grasp when the pain was stronger than usual. At last his

eyes closed, and as Miss May bent her head over him to listen for his breathing he said softly: "Blessed May!" And, indeed, she had been quite a mother to the boy, for, as she said, she came to Stubble Farm the day he was born, and although Harold had been her charge and her pupil, she had taught Ernest his letters and his prayers, taken him first to church, and indeed cared for him as a mother. How the tears rolled down her cheek as she thought of that fatal journey after the clean pinafore, during which he had clambered to see the hounds from the window, and pulled the jug down as he climbed; and as the long weary hours passed in silence, both offered up prayers for the life of the boy.

Tom Strong went his way in the morning to meet the squire and try and find him some sport, and though he would willingly have done anything in his power for his son, he was glad of any excuse to leave Stubble Farm while sickness was there, for he was no man for a

sick-chamber. The maid-servants all did what they could, for they were very sorry ; and Old Jemmy said :

“Drat the hounds and them fine folks ! They’ve reg’lar upset old Blackbird, and the black sow has trod on a pig, trying to get out after them hounds.”

He further brought in half-a-gallon of his best apples to be roasted for Master Ernest, as soon as he should be able to eat one.

Suffield the keeper was already waiting on the bridge with six couples of beagles, when Farmer Strong joined him.

“Are there many going out to-day ?” inquired the farmer.

“Only you and me, I think,” said the keeper. “And a pretty time we shall have of it, I’ll be bound, for the butler says there’s another letter about that cussed railway, and he’s in an awful temper : but here he comes.”

“Morning, Strong,” said the squire, who was well mounted, and who stood six feet and an

inch out of the saddle. "Now, Suffield, uncouple those hounds. Take his horse, Strong."

"Volumy, Volumy, Volumy! Here, Volumy!"

"'Volumy!' you stupid blockhead," said the squire. "Haven't I told you twenty times that the name of that hound is Volatile?"

Suffield touched his hat and said "Volatile;" but before they had beaten one field for a hare he called the same hound Valentine, which brought down a volley of abuse from the squire; and then, when in the next field he called her Volume, the squire swore at him, threatened to horsewhip him, and sent him home altogether.

"Here, Strong," said the squire, "hunt these hounds, for that fool is only fit to trap foxes and weazles, and can't recollect the names of twelve hounds."

No hare was forthcoming, and the squire grew impatient, when the farmer called out "See-ho!"

"See-ho," said the squire, "what do you mean by that? If you mean there's a hare there I

know you are wrong, for I saw Volatile beat that bank all the way up."

"I can see her sit," said the farmer.

"I don't believe you," replied the squire.

"Shall I put her up?" asked the farmer.

"Put what up?" inquired the squire.

"Why, the hare," said the farmer.

"There's no hare there, I tell you."

Tom Strong then proceeded to put out the hare, and when the hounds gave tongue his landlord's spirits revived, and they crossed several fields in hot pursuit, until Volatile persisted in running along a hedge through which she should have passed, and the scent was lost.

"Try back there—try back—try back!" said the squire. "Strong, where are they at fault?"

"The hare passed through this mushe," replied the farmer.

"I tell you she didn't," replied the squire.

"Didn't you see Volatile run by it?"

"Yes, sir. But the hare went through it; I saw her."

"Nonsense, man," said his landlord. "Don't you think the hound knows better than you?"

No persuasion would induce Volatile to go through the mushe, and when the farmer suggested that he should take the hounds round to the other side, his landlord told him it was useless. "But," said he, "as you are so persistent, go, and convince yourself of your error."

Farmer Strong then trotted round with the hounds, and they picked up the scent from the other side at once, and ran merrily across the hill. At last poor pussy was sighted, and she soon became a prey to her pursuers; and when Tom Strong handed her over to the squire he threw her amongst his hounds, delighted to blood them, and was quite an altered man.

"Strong," said he, "I hope you will forgive me for being so hasty. You were right on both occasions, and I shall always send for you when I want sport. I wish you would take these hounds to that Suffield. Good-day."

But Tom Strong wished in his heart that this

might be the last occasion of his hunting with the squire: "For," said he, "I have to control my own temper, and it's what I'm not used to."

Miss May's time was now too fully occupied to admit of her giving Harold his daily lessons, consequently he roamed at his pleasure over the house, farm, and homestead. It was a bright frosty morning as he issued from the house in search of amusement, every blade of grass, every branch of the trees, every inch of the thatching, and even the backs of some of the animals, were frosted as it were with a coating of silver, and the breath of each animal was visibly ascending. Old Jemmy had long since fed them all, for see, he must be now 'in his granary, as the door is open and the steps are down. And Harold has noticed it. See how he buttons his warm coat, pulls on his woollen gloves, and runs up the steps. Jemmy must be there, for old Tiger, the large tabby cat, is inside, and he follows Jemmy to the granary whenever he can.

"Where's Jemmy," says Harold, as he catches the cat by the tail.

"Me-aw-ull-l," says Tiger in response, for he is not a cat to be trifled with.

"Don't hurt the cat," Master Harold, says a voice known as Jemmy's, which emanates from an enclosed cornbin; "I'm only putting on a clean shirt, I shall be out directly."

Now this was one of Jemmy's many peculiarities. He would keep his best clothes, including his Sunday top hat, which he brushed the reverse way, in the cornbin, in a large oaken coffer; for although every convenience was offered to Jemmy in his bedroom, he would not avail himself of it, and his granary was his sanctum. 'Tis true the cornbins, this one excepted, were full of corn, and the open space in the centre was stacked with sacks containing an immense variety of seeds, but every little niche or corner contained a collection of Jemmy's hoarding. There was a horn used for drenching the cows in one corner, a bottle for calves in

another corner, a small three-cornered portion of a looking-glass, Jemmy's shaving-glass, on one ledge, some coppers on another, half-a-crown on another, and on the topmost ledge under the roofing was half-a-sovereign covered with dust. As Jemmy emerged from his changing-place, the cat came down from his hiding-place, and rubbed round him whilst he proceeded to daub a thick coating of grease over a strong pair of tipped and nailed boots, previously to lacing them on anew. This done, Jemmy readjusted his top hat and said : " Now then, Master Harold, I'm going to shut the shop up. If you want some apples, there's some in that bushel-basket under the sack." Harold filled his pockets with apples, and descended from the granary, whilst Jemmy filled a measure with peas for the little pigs, and then both went on their way.

At the first barn the fixed threshing-machine was being worked to thresh the corn in the barn, and three horses were being driven round and round in a circle to work it. One man was

busy carrying out the threshed straw, which he took up a ladder to the top of a stack that he was making with it. Another man was raking away the corn and chaff that fell from the machine, and heaping it up on the floor of the barn, ready for the winnowing process. On the top of the corn in the mow of the barn were two women and one man. One woman was pitching the sheaves of corn to the mouth of the machine, whilst the other woman was cutting the bands with a knife, and handing them to the man, who spread and divided them as they fell into the machine to be threshed, amidst a cloud of dust that made them all nearly invisible.

Harold seized his opportunity, and ran into the centre of the horse-gear to the boy who was riding on the centrepiece, and driving the horses round and round, whilst he whistled and sang, and popped his whip, happy as a farmer's boy.

"What have you blindfolded that mare for?" inquired Harold.

"She jumps when I go to hit her, Master Harold," said the boy, and we are afraid she will break one of the cog-wheels. You'll very soon be giddy if you stop here. Have you got one of those apples to spare, sir?"

So Harold gives him an apple and runs on to the next barn, where two men are threshing barley with flails. Wop, wop, wop, wop, they are going, with a regularity that resembles the ticking of a clock; and as the flail swings over their heads it does not look safe to intrude. Although the weather is cold the men have no coat or waistcoat on; their shirts too are open, and the perspiration is trickling down their brows. Immediately outside the barn-door, which looks out into the yard on one side, are the ducks and barn-door fowls, looking eagerly out for a stray corn that may fly off from the blows of the flail; and underneath the straw which has been tossed out, preparatory to its being placed in the cow-racks for the cattle to muzzle, is something alive, and

Harold has seated himself on the top of the moving mass. See, away he goes, straw and all, until three pigs run from under him, and both he and the straw fall to the ground.

But what is that rattling in the next barn, and that cloud of dust that is coming therefrom? It is the other barnmen, who are winnowing up their fortnight's work to see how many quarters of oats they have threshed, at one-and-twopence per quarter; for to-morrow is market-day, and every week a carriage of corn is provided for the four prancing fat gray horses, from the best-team stable, to draw in one of the yellow waggons to market; and by the time the chestnut mare has delivered her master at the hotel, a sack, as a sample, will be pitched in the open on the stones in the market-place ready for him to sell; and the waggon will stand there too, whilst the carter and horses put up at the inn until they receive orders to deliver the corn.

What a rattle the winnowing-machine is making, and Harold has to hold his handkerchief

to his face as he rushes through to the back of the machine, where the men are busy. One is fully occupied turning the handle whilst the other two fill the machine on the top with the unwinnowed corn, and then bag-up the best sample that comes down behind, from which all the dust has been blown and all the inferior corns and rubbish extracted by sieves, over which it has passed in its downward progress. How carefully they place the strike in the empty bushel, and then when the measure has been heaped up with the shovel, never touching the bushel or shaking it, the strike is gently extracted endways, and the top is skimmed off to make measure.

"Come out of that," says the head-man, Slade, an ill-tempered man, to Harold as he gets in the way. "We don't want you boys here. Something will happen to *you* directly, and then your father will blame us. You'd better be off."

"I shall go when I like," says Harold. "I've more right here than you have."

But no one answers him, and he runs off to

No. 4 barn, where another man is cutting and mixing chaff for the sheep.

"Well done, Master Harold," says Dick Aton. "I'm glad you've come to see poor old Dick all alone here. Can you spare me one of those apples for my little grandson?" Harold gave him two, which he placed in his coat, which hung on a nail, and then he said: "Master Harold, do you mind mixing my chaff for me whilst I cut four more boxes? for I expect the shepherd and old Blackbird here every minute, and they want twenty-five six-bushel bags to-day. It's wonderful what them sheep eats this cold weather. Come, sir," said he, "you must pull that coat off, and then spread the chaff out whilst I put in the malt-dust, and the pea-chaff, and the bran, and then you turn it all over and mix it up, whilst I cut four more boxes full, and then hold the bags for me whilst I fill them; and I'll show you my two little hares that I have in the lockup where I keep the pea-chaff."

So Harold pulled his coat off whilst Dick

Aton shot the pea-chaff, the bran, and the malt-dust, and then he mixed it up with a barn shovel on the floor, whilst Aton filled his chaff-box with damaged hay, burnt hay, oat straw, and good hay, all of which slid down the chaff-box, whilst Dick Aton lifted the cutting-knife at one end, which action tightened the hay in the box and drew it forward an inch. Very soon he was lifting away like a top-sawyer, whilst the cut chaff fell from the box to the tune of "Che-a-pup-up, che-a-pup-up," a sound made by the cutting and machinery of his chaff-box.

"There, sir," said he, "that will do nicely. Let me spread this chaff on the top, and now you hold up a bag, and we shall soon be ready for the shepherd."

Dick Aton's large shovelfuls soon filled the bags, twenty-five of which ere long stood in a row with their mouths tied well with string, and the two had completed the task.

"Now, Master Harold, what's the time?"

"It wants five minutes to one."

"Then just time for me to show you the hares before dinner-time."

And there they were, two pretty tame hares, which Dick Aton dragged out from behind a sack in the corner. He had reared them from quite little ones, and they were tame as kittens to him when no one was there save himself.

But what a silence now prevails throughout the farm! the crow of a solitary cock is all that can be heard. The threshing and winnowing machines have stopped, and the two men who were wielding the flail are sitting on the sheaves of corn with half-a-loaf, a small piece of cheese, and an onion, for it is dinner-time, and being near the end of the week, the meat no longer holds out, although truly they need some stronger support for such trying work. Eleven shillings per week will not always find bacon, but they are all allowed one pint of ale from the house; and as Aton and Harold are going that way, see, here comes Old Jemmy

with the village blacksmith to break off the tusks of the hog.

"Now, Dick, and you barnmen," says Jemmy, "you must come and help us hold Jack, for he's a rum fellow upset, and will want some strong holding, and then Master Harold will go and get you all an extra pint of beer, for I expect he'll be resolute."

The sight of the blacksmith put Jack on his mettle, for on two previous occasions he had placed rings in his nose, and, as he looked over the sty, Jack made a dash at him, but the blacksmith tapped him on the nose with his pincers, and, as the pincers struck the rings in his nose, Jack shook his head and retired to the corner.

"Now, you men," said the blacksmith, "I'll drop this corded loop in his mouth, and then you must rush in and take hold of his tail and his ears, whilst I drag him up to this ring in the post, and relieve him of those pretty ornaments."

So saying he got on the top of the sty, and as Jack opened his mouth to attack him, he dropped the cord in his jaw and dragged him a prisoner to the post, 'midst a squeal and a scuffle surprising to hear.

"He's a very fine fellow," he says. "Let him savage the post for awhile, and then I'll snap off his tusks with these pincers, for he's scarcely safe as he is."

The snapping was not a process of haste, but at last, with his mouth full of blood, and his tusks less by two inches, the pig was released, whilst his bristles stuck up, and his persecutors cleared away, taking care to close first the door of his sty and release him from without.

"Now, my friends," said the blacksmith, "whilst all your blood's warm I've another job just in hand, for Mr. Strong called last night to say I was to ring the large bull, and see, here is the instrument which we must insert in his nose."

The instrument referred to was a thick ring, to be passed through the cartilage which separates the nostrils, where it was to remain suspended as a handle whereby to remind the poor bull of his subservience to man. The nostril of the bullock is the most tender part of its body, and with a stick which is fastened on to the ring by means of an iron clasp, the largest bull may be led by a child.

Jemmy took off his hat, scratched his head, replaced his hat, and tucked hard at one of his gaiters as if in deep thought, then, confronting the blacksmith, he said: "Drat it, don't ring the poor fellow, 'twas only his play, I'm not afraid of him."

"Now, Jemmy," replied the blacksmith, "you know it is no good. Our master told me that he saw the bull run at you the other day, and that he is not safe. He said I was to ring him, and if he told me to put a ring in your nose, you know very well, Master James, that I should lose Mr. Strong's work if I couldn't do it, and

I can't afford that. Here, Master Harold, just run and put this little poker of mine in the fire, and when it is red-hot bring it to me, that's a good young gentleman; and tell the maid that, if the bull does not kill me, I shall be in to have some dinner in half-an-hour. Now come along, my boys; Master James, I want some strong cord and a new headstall halter."

Then the party proceeded to the bull's stall, and as they opened the door the bull arose from his slumber, to wonder why he had such a party to visit his stall.

"Now, my boys, pull your coats off, for he's a fine strong fellow. Wo, Roger, my boy, only a little ring for your nose," and the bull kicks at the blacksmith for daring to pat him.

"Now, Jemmy, put this headstall on him, and tie this rope to the end of it. We must pull his head up to that strong post and tie it doubly, and then you men all keep him up to the side, whilst I make a little hole with

the red-hot iron through his nose for the ring. Slip the end through that ring in the post, now pull altogether:" and the plunging bull is drawn up to the post. "Now tie his neck-collar to the post; keep him up, my boys. Now wind the cord round the post, or he might pull the ring out, and then where should we be? Come along, Master Harold; it's nice and hot I see. Hold tight, my boys. Now for the pinch."

"Bora-bor-bor!" says the agonised bull, as the red-hot iron is passed through his nose.

"Here, take the iron, Master Harold; now for the ring."

"Bor-bor," as it passes through again, and the blacksmith fastens the clasp in the ring, inserts also a pin in it, and the bull is ringed.

"Poor feller!" says Jemmy, as he pats the trembling bull.

"Let him alone, Jemmy, let him alone," calls the blacksmith. "I want just to move the ring round a time or two; and then you had

best let him stop where he is, until he has stopped bleeding and come to his senses. If Jemmy brings him a drop of water by-and-by he will be all right when we are all gone; just loosen his head a bit, my boys, and then leave him to Jemmy, and I hope he will take a prize when he is fat, for I never saw a nicer bull, and he gave us a warming. Let us go and drink his health, my boys, two nasty jobs done at one time. If blacksmithing was all ringing bulls, breaking boars' tusks, and shoeing of colts, I don't know who would want to be a blacksmith." And then the party went round to the kitchen to have some good ale.

"Good-day, and thank you, Mr. Strong," says the blacksmith, after partaking of a hearty meal.

"You're welcome," says the farmer, "and I must say you are the boy for me. Did you ever come across a job you couldn't tackle?"

"Why, yes, sir; I must own I was beat once, for a gentleman sent for me one day to shoe his kangaroo, and I couldn't do it, but it was only a joke, and he gave me a good dinner and paid me for coming. Good-morning, sir."

And the village blacksmith shouldered his basket and journeyed on to the next farm to shoe two unbroken cart colts: "For" said he, "I always feel better up for rough work after a visit to Stubble Farm."

Dr. Bowen called regularly to see Ernest, whom he now pronounced out of danger, but the shrieks of the poor child as he cauterised his little chest, to burn off the proud flesh, were most agonising and heartrending to the whole household. It would be a very long time before he would grow out of his injuries, perhaps twenty years, and the marks would always remain, for burns and scalds never heal over; his chest too might be contracted. Still he struggled along, and he sat up for an hour

the day that Joe Dobbs the cattle dealer came to Stubble Farm, preparatory to his going a long journey on the morrow with Tom Strong to a large cattle fair.

CHAPTER III.

Joe Dobbs the Cattle Dealer and Thomas Strong en route for the Fair—Betsy the Trotting Mare and the Dun Cob—Mr. Strong, senior, and his Household.

JACK the nagman was despatched the day previous with the chestnut mare and gig, to stay at a roadside publichouse, and to have the mare groomed and harnessed, in readiness to take Farmer Strong and Joe Dobbs the next part of the journey, whilst the dealer's dun cob was put in at the farm, and tended by Jemmy, to draw both farmer and dealer half the way on the morrow.

Tom Strong was right glad that his boy was so well, and he made his friend quite at

home, and they merrily sang and told lots of tales over long pipe and glass until bedtime.

On the morrow they started. Joe Dobbs drove his dun, and a good cob he was.

"That's a nice lot of fattening sheep, Tom," said he, as they trotted by Tom's best flock; "what are you making of them?"

"Why, I'm getting sixty-five to seventy-five shillings a-head for them; they are part of the two hundred we bought at this same fair two years ago; but my shepherd's a careful old man."

"Let me see, Tom, they were two-tooth sheep then, and now they would be rising four-tooth. They cost a pound a-head then, now just tell me how you have done them."

"Well," said Tom Strong, "when we got them home, they just ran in the straw-yard, and picked over some bean-straw by night, and by day we took them out behind the other sheep, to pick up the shells of the swedes; and didn't they fill themselves right well and

grow! Then in the spring they ran the lanes, and were folded on some tares. Then they lay about in the meadows until stubbling time, when they ran the stubble by day, and were folded on some ploughed ground by night. Then they fed off some rape and some turnips; and this last summer I put them on some good pasture until the swedes came in, and gave them just a few old beans to crack; and now, since they have had a bit of oilcake they have come out well. I hope we shall pick up just such another lot at the fair, for I shall soon have room for them."

"Tom," said Joe Dobbs, "I want to call at Farmer Lum's to look at a bunch of ewes, these will be them, won't they?" and he pulled up his horse to look at a nice little flock of young ewes, which were hurdled in a field over the hedge.

"A nice little flock, Tom, what are they worth?"

Tom Strong said "Thirty-five shillings each,"

but Joe Dobbs said "Thirty-two, my boy ; I shall bid him thirty. See, there stands the old chap waiting for me ; never saw a more nervous man in my life ; what a poor lot of hurdles he's got ; the old boy must sell the sheep, for he wants the money. When we get round to him, you jump down, and mind you shut the gate again, and then sit on the bank, and don't move until I tell you. I'll take the nervousness out of him."

With this they drove into the field, and Tom jumped down and shut the gate behind them, whilst the dealer bade good-morning to Mr. Lum.

"Jump up, Mr. Lum," said Joe Dobbs.

"Is your horse quiet?" inquired that gentleman.

"Quiet as a lamb, sir."

Mr. Lum carefully ascended, and sat by the side of Mr. Dobbs, who commenced to canter his horse towards the sheep-pen, much to the discomfort of Lum.

"I'll get down and open the hurdles," said Lum.

"Oh, don't trouble," replied Dobbs, "hurdles never trouble me ;" and so saying he put his horse at the hurdles, and jumped bodily into the pen, whilst Lum clung to Joe Dobbs like a frightened child. Of course the wheels of the gig knocked the already sloping hurdles down to the ground, so there was no necessity to jump again, after inspecting the scampering sheep, for which a bargain was struck on the spot ; but as the two neared the closed gate, Mr. Lum modestly inquired : " Shall I open the gate, Mr. Dobbs ? "

" Gates ! " said that gentleman, applying the whip to the dun cob, " we never take any notice of gates. Sit tight ; " and away he galloped, as if to charge the gate as he had charged the hurdles. But Mr. Lum was determined that his body should be spared such a mad jump, so, without replying, he clambered out of the gig behind, falling very uncomfortably, whilst Joe Dobbs pulled his horse in, and he and Tom Strong laughed right heartily at poor Mr. Lum rubbed his bruises.

" Come, Mr. Lum, you are not hurt. There's

room for us all to ride to your farm in my gig. I have the notes in my pocket for the sheep. Jump up."

"No, thank you," said Lum, "I'll never ride with you again. I've had quite enough of your practical joking;" and indeed it was fortunate for poor Mr. Lum that the ground was soft where he fell.

A second breakfast was soon disposed of as a luncheon. Notes were handed over in exchange for the sheep, which would be called for, as Dobbs's own drovers came by on their way home from the fair, whither they had been previously despatched, and Joe Dobbs and Tom Strong trotted merrily on for the fair.

"That's a comfortable old couple in that gig on in front," said Joe Dobbs, "but I must just remind them of the uncertainty of life as we pass. You point to the wheel on this side, whilst I call out 'Linchpin,' and then see the old gent pull up and examine, whilst we trot ahead."

A shake of the rein put the dun cob on his mettle, and with a voice that made the old couple tremble and jump, Joe Dobbs called out as he passed: "Look to your linchpin!" whilst Tom Strong leant over the gig behind and pointed to the wheel. When the old gentleman driving had recovered the shock of Joe Dobbs's voice, he murmured: "I thank you," but the dun cob was out of earshot with his saucy burden, and Tom Strong was looking back to see the old gentleman pull up and descend to examine his wheels, which he did.

"Is that your knife, lying in the road there, just ten yards behind?" said Joe Dobbs to a boy; and then the poor boy was soon seen looking for what he had long coveted but would not possess, for it was not there. Then a long hill was before them, and, as the dun cob pulled up after galloping part of the way, Joe Dobbs and Tom Strong alighted to walk the remainder to ease their horse.

"That's a fine strong countryman walking

ahead of us, Tom," said Joe. "I'll be bound he's a fool, and I'll prove it. Let us make haste to overtake him, he will amuse us until we reach the top of this hill. Let the cob have his head, he will follow us up."

"How d'ye do?" said Joe Dobbs to the countryman. "Why, I never thought of seeing you again. How well you are looking."

"Begging your pardon," said the stranger, at the same time pulling a small portion of his hair, which hung over his forehead, "I don't recollect seein' of you avore."

Joe Dobbs did not reply to him, but addressing Tom Strong, he said:

"This is the man I have so often told you about, that did me that kindness. If it hadn't been for him I don't know what I should have done. I promised him half-a-crown every time I saw him, and now he pretends he is not the man, and I daresay he will refuse to take the half-crown."

"A good action," said Tom Strong, "should

be always rewarded, and I think 'tis a pity, young man, that you should try to stop my kind-hearted friend from doing a grateful action."

"I don't want to stop him," replied the countryman; "I only ses I forgets it; but I daresay 'tis right. I'll take half-a-crown if he likes to give me one."

"Hold hard, Tom," says Joe, and he produces from his pocket a five-shilling piece and a half-crown, and was about to give the man the five-shilling piece, when he pretended to discover his mistake, and saying: "Oh, this is half-a-crown," presented him with a half-crown piece.

"Thank you, sir," said the stranger; "I be very much obliged to you. I hope you'll have a safe journey."

"My friend," said Joe Dobbs, "you are very welcome indeed, and when you see me again, always come to me and I'll serve you the same, for I never forget a kind action. And now,

Tom," said he, "we're on top of the hill. Let us get up."

When they were seated Joe Dobbs shook the countryman by the hand and wished him good-day, and told him always to help people that were in distress, for it paid in the end, and then, as he was starting, he pulled his horse up again and called the countryman to his side.

"My friend," said he, "I feel that grateful to you that words won't express it. It may be a long time before I see you again. See, here is the five-shilling piece. Give me back that half-crown and take this, for half-a-crown is not much at the time for the service you rendered." And then the countryman handed back the half-crown and Joe Dobbs drove away, and both laughed at his greed, and Joe Dobbs held the five-shilling piece up for him to see until the distance was too great.

"Tom," said Joe, "I told you that man was a fool, but we have taught him one lesson he'll

never forget. And now, Tom, it is just five miles to the inn where we change horses, and a good road too. I hope they have a good dinner waiting for us. The dun cob goes in good form. Hark! who is this coming behind?"

Tom Strong stole a sly glance behind, and reported that it was a gentleman with a fine high-stepping black horse, and that he was fast gaining on them.

"Let him come on, Tom, and both touch our hats as he passes and wish him good-morning, and then we will show him the way to the inn."

The gentleman with the black horse and gig returned the salute, and Joe held the dun cob back to let him go by, and then he let the cob trot with his nose close to the wheel behind their new fellow-traveller.

"You've a nice little cob there," remarked that gentleman, "but you two are quite a load for him."

"Yes, sir," said Joe Dobbs, "and we have to

go on to the Green Man, and we are afraid he won't hold out, for we've come a long way;" and then the stranger touched his reins, and his black horse distanced them; but soon the dun cob's nose was again at the wheel of his trap, and again the occupants conversed.

"I can't help admiring your horse, sir," said Joe Dobbs.

"Yes," said the gentleman, "he is a noble animal, and I gave a good price for him. He is open to trot anything about here for five pounds. What is the name of your little cob?"

Said Joe Dobbs: "I don't dare say his name, sir, but I will trot you to the Green Man for the price of our dinners, and bet you three bottles of wine that we are there first."

"Adone!" said the gentleman.

"Will-o'-the-Wisp," said Joe Dobbs, and immediately he had said the word, Will-o'-the-Wisp (for that was the name of the dun cob) shot to the front, which he kept without trouble, in spite of the exertions of the black trotter

behind him. How their hoofs rattled along the road, and how the wheels flew round!

"Will-o'-the-Wisp," repeated Joe Dobbs, and turning round he took off his hat to the stranger, who was pulling and whipping at his black trotter. "No one catches Will-o'-the-Wisp, sir," repeated Joe Dobbs, and at every sound of his name the dun cob shot ahead, until he was full two hundred yards in front of his adversary, now foaming and sweating, whilst Tom Strong kept watch from behind. Another hundred yards was gained before they reached the Green Man, and when Mr. Johnson, the driver of the black horse, turned in there also, he left his own horse to admire the dun cob.

"What will you take for him?" he inquired of Joe Dobbs.

"You haven't got enough to pay for him," replied that gentleman; "for why shouldn't a poor cattle dealer have as good a horse as a gentleman like yourself?"

Jack the nagman took charge of Will-o'-the-

Wisp, who was very soon eating his beans as if nothing had happened, and the landlord having announced that he had a couple of roast fowls and a ham on the table, the party of three sat down to their dinner, to which they did ample justice.

"Are you going to the fair, sir?" inquired Mr. Dobbs, as they sat sipping their wine after dinner.

"Yes," replied that gentleman, now somewhat excited, "I am."

"And where do you stop, sir?" asked Mr. Strong.

"At the Blue Boar."

"Indeed, sir! That's the very place where we stop."

"Do you drive that same horse all the way?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Johnson. "He always goes better after he has been a few miles. You are changing horses, or I'll be bound I'd be there first."

"Well, sir," said Joe Dobbs, "we were going to change, but I'll bet you five pounds we are there first, and we will drive which horse you like."

"Then I'll take you," replied Mr. Johnson, "and I'll have you drive the other one, for I don't like that dun cob at all. However, I don't care to trot fast all the way. Suppose we go together until we get within five miles, and then finish it?"

"Just as you like," replied Tom Strong, "you pays your money and you takes your choice."

"But you are not sure I shall have to pay," replied Mr. Johnson. "Do you know, I never was beaten before, and if that chestnut mare in the stable is the one you have against me, I feel quite safe, I assure you."

The three bottles of wine were supplemented with cigars and brandy-and-water before the party again set out for the fair, and when Tom Strong called out: "Let her go, Jack!" it was

evident that the chestnut mare had fared quite as well as her master. For some time Tom Strong had all his work to keep her quiet, and now and then she tightened her kicking strap, and blew her nose as much as to say: "I have the power to settle you all with my heels;" but presently she arched her neck and trotted off, 'midst the admiration of Jack, the landlord, and ostler, all of whom said it was ten to one on her, although she had two to draw, and the black had been off round the corner for some moments. But where was Mr. Johnson and his black horse? He had only just started round the corner, and Joe Dobbs says to this day that he must have taken a short cut somewhere, for he never appeared until they were within five miles of the town, and then quite half-a-mile ahead, and "going like steam." It is now for the chestnut mare to lose or win five pounds. The last two milestones had been passed in four minutes, and they were gaining on the black. One mile only stood between them

and the town, and already, see, the chestnut's nose is at the wheel of his gig. See, now she is side by side with him; and now her nose is ahead of his; and now Tom Strong speaks to her.

"Now, Betsy," he says; and look, her ears move to catch his voice, and the chestnut mare is in front. And now what comes? It is the coach that runs by Tom Strong's farm. The coachman stands up and shouts:

"Bravo, Tom Strong! Well done, Betsy!" for he knows the gallant mare.

Then a general shout goes up from the passengers on the coach. Mr. Johnson has to fall back to allow the coach to pass. The black trotter strikes into a canter, and the wager is lost, for the chestnut mare, with her coat covered with lather, is trotting under the gateway of the Blue Boar.

Two of Joe Dobbs's cattle-drovers appear, who have long since arrived.

"Did you order our double-bedded room?" Mr. Dobbs inquires of them.

"Yes, master," the men reply ; and then, after a short parley with Mr. Strong, he calls the men. Here says he : "The ostler seems very busy. Just you take care of this mare. She is nearly pumped. Get her harness off as quick as you can, and let her lie down if she will, and get some nice warm gruel down her, and rub her ears and sponge her nostrils, and then get her clean, and give her a little lukewarm water to drink ; and, when you have got her nice and dry and comfortable, come and call us to look at her, for you will be wanting your supper, and a drop of something warm to keep the cold out."

"Yes, master," the men reply, and the mare is soon led panting to the stable with her head almost touching the ground, and the perspiration dropping from all parts of her body.

Mr. Johnson has gone to another stable, but he soon joins his fellow-travellers, pays his wager, and partakes of two bottles of port.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Dobbs," says the land-

lord, "but I can't give you the double-bedded room all to yourselves. There is a large bed and a small bed, and I must fill up these times. The other gentleman who will sleep there is a very respectable gentleman, and if your friend does not mind sharing the large bed with him, he will find him everything that is respectable and right. He has stopped here for many years, I assure you."

The matter, however, was not so easily arranged, for neither Mr. Dobbs nor Mr. Strong would consent to a sleeping partner.

"I tell you what, landlord," said Mr. Dobbs, "you can charge us for the room of three persons, but sleep with a man neither of us will consent to."

"Well, gentlemen," replied the landlord, "I tried all I knew, before you came, to get the gentleman to have a bed on the sofa in our best parlour, and my missis has made it up with clean sheets and everything, but the gent won't consent. He is in the smoking-room; perhaps you would like to

“speak to him?” and so saying he led the way to the smoking-room, and introduced Mr. Dobbs and Mr. Strong.

Mr. Dobbs went right to the subject, but the gentleman was determined not to give way.

Said he: “I have as much right to a comfortable bed as you have. I was here first and I shan’t give up my bed. I am very tired and shall very soon be asleep, so I shan’t interfere with you.”

“Do you have your bed warmed?” said Mr. Dobbs.

“Bed warmed! No, sir,” replied their intended bedfellow. “Never heard of such a thing. Only fit for old people and invalids.”

“Curious thing, sir,” replied Mr. Dobbs; “now, I always like my bed warmed; but, of course, I shall be very careful not to touch you with the warming-pan. Try and lie as straight as you can, sir.”

“If I thought you were in earnest,” replied the respectable stranger, “I should send for a constable.

I would have you to know, gentlemen, that I am here to transact business; if you interfere with me I shall take steps to put the law in motion ;" and so saying, he took his hat and wished them good-evening, seeking refuge in another part of the house.

Trotting horses and trotting matches formed the subject of the evening's conversation, and, after a visit to the stable, Betsy was declared to be in good order, and open to trot Mr. Johnson again anywhere and anywhen; but that gentleman had grown wiser, for although, as he said, he had never been beaten before, Messrs. Strong and Dobbs had completely taken the wind out of his sails, and, said he: "It will be a long time before I make another match."

Perhaps the landlord had the best of it, for there was no stint of grogs.

Their intended bedfellow must indeed have been tired, to sleep as soundly as he did. But, after all, I don't think he could have dropped off with a perfect conviction that Mr. Dobbs was not

going to warm his bed, for he is lying as straight as possible and quite at the outside of the bed.

As Tom Strong is putting on his slippers, preparatory to going to bed, he is every now and then laughing aloud to himself. What can it be about ?

"Don't make such a row," says Joe Dobbs ; "you'll spoil the job. Is this our candle, landlord ? Good-night, old boy. Come on, Tom."

"You know the way, gentlemen ; first door on the right at the top of the stairs."

"All right, gove'nor," replies Joe Dobbs, at the same time reaching the cold warming-pan that hung against the wall. "Mind you call us as soon as it is light. Good-night," and they are going upstairs, whilst Joe Dobbs carries the warming-pan as if it were a rifle.

"My eye ! isn't it cold, Joe ?" says Tom.

"Yes," says the other. "This will touch him up. Now, I will light you to put all his clothes out on the landing, and directly he goes to call the landlord up you fasten him out. You open

the bed at the bottom for me to warm him ; and stop that grinning. I never slept with a man in my life, and ain't going to."

The unconscious stranger was snoring as Tom Strong, having first put his clothes out, opened the bottom of the bed, and Joe Dobbs quietly inserted the warming-pan, but the moment it touched his body he awoke with a jump, and at once realised his position.

"You scoundrel!" he said, "you have burnt me. Oh dear, oh dear! all down my leg, all down my leg! You wretch, you wretch! Oh my poor leg! Oh dear, oh dear!" and he rushed to the bell and then to the landing, and then the lock was turned against him, and Joe Dobbs and Tom Strong took possession of the bedroom.

Very loud were the excited exclamations of the gentleman, who thought he had been burnt with the cold warming-pan, but louder much was the laughing of the saucy occupants of the bedroom ; and, when the practical joke became evident, the landlord was heard to say :

"I told you, sir, you had better have the bed in the best parlour, for I knew they were two larky dogs; but it's still ready, sir." And then all was silence at the Blue Boar.

"Tom," said Joe Dobbs, as he awoke in the morning, "have you got the matches? If so, strike a light, boy, and see what the time is. I've heard the cocks crowing for some time."

"It wants five minutes to six, Joe."

"Then we must bundle up, for by the time we have had our breakfast the things will be coming in to the fair, and we must walk out and meet them coming in, my boy."

So up they got and found that the drovers were already astir.

"They've got your breakfast ready," said one, "I routed them out about five o'clock."

"The mare's all right, Master Strong," said the other.

"Now, Tom," said Joe Dobbs, "will you have any more of this tea, there's plenty more in the pot?"

"No, thank you."

"Then come along, for we must go and meet the sheep coming in to the fair."

"I wonder," said Joe, as the two walked up the street, "if there's any sheep in the pens yet. It is getting light. Hullo!" said he, as they approached a large square area of hurdled pens, "there's one lot in there. And bless me if it isn't that old farmer's that 'lent me one' last fair. I bought his sheep—a lot I especially wanted for a very particular customer; and hang me if he hadn't sold them again at one shilling a-head more money when I went to pay him for them. But now's our time, Tom. We must find out what he asks to-day, and then leave the old chap 'up a ladder,' just about five rounds above anybody's reach. He always asks about eight shillings a-head more than they are worth, and if we bid him close he won't sell them at first, and he will overstand his market, and have to take them home again. You stop here a bit, for it won't do for him to see us together."

"Good-morning, Mr. Ramsbottom," said Joe Dobbs. "Nice lot of sheep, sir. What are you asking for them?"

"Thirty-six shillings," said Mr. Ramsbottom.

"Suppose you would take thirty-five from me, sir?" replied Joe Dobbs.

"Not unless I am obliged to," said Mr. Ramsbottom.

"Well, sir, I hope you won't sell them away from me to-day."

"I shall be here all the morning, and if you alter your mind please let me know." And then Joe Dobbs strolled round to Tom Strong.

"Tom," said he, "the old stupid asks thirty-six for sheep worth twenty-eight. I bid him thirty-five. Go round and bid him thirty-four. He won't sell them, I know, and then he is 'up a ladder;' for I always like to pay my debts."

Tom did so, and then left Mr. Ramsbottom.

As the two strolled out of the town they met a nice flock of four-tooth sheep, driven by a boy and a dog.

"This is a nice lot, Tom. I must have them. I've got a place for them, Tom." And, calling to the boy, Mr. Dobbs inquired: "Whose sheep be they, my little man?"

The boy stopped, and pointing to the mark on the sheep, he replied:

"T. V., John Hill.¹ Can't you read, you fool?"

"I'll put this stick round you, you saucy young dog," said Mr. Dobbs.

"If you do old Boxer will have hold of your leg," said the boy.

"Where's your master?" further inquired Mr. Dobbs.

"I 'ain't got one," said the boy.

"Now look here," said Mr. Dobbs, "here's sixpence for you, and I want you to come and find me when the man comes into the fair that belongs to these sheep. Come and fetch the sixpence."

"Ah," said the boy, "you don't catch I like that. If I was to come for the sixpence you'd hit me with that long ash stick o' yourn."

Mr. Dobbs ended the controversy by pitching the boy the coin, and following up that action by saying: "You come and find me directly your master comes in, and then I'll give you another sixpence; and if I buy the sheep I shall give you another shilling."

And sure enough the boy, who now touched his cap to Joe Dobbs, was very soon possessed of the two shillings, and the sheep were bought by Mr. Dobbs.

And now the town was full of sheep, and dogs, and dealers, and farmers, and every now and then Mr. Ramsbottom catches sight of Mr. Dobbs as he walks round the pens, but he somehow misses him. But now he has got him.

"Mr. Dobbs," says he, will you come and have another look at my sheep? I've been bid thirty-four for them directly you left me."

"Coming directly. Don't sell them away from me," says Joe Dobbs; and he goes on his way rejoicing in his heart at having left poor Mr. Ramsbottom "up a ladder."

"Now, Tom," says he, "have you bought your sheep? because I've bought six hundred, and I'm very soon off."

"Yes," says Tom, "I've bought two hundred, and if you will let them run along with yours, I can give you a night's lodging at my farm, for I have a bit of rough meadow that wants tearing up, and I can give them some hay and a few swedes."

"I say, Tom, there's someone looking at old Ramsbottom's sheep. I wonder where the old man is. We must go and crab that customer. You go and pretend to examine them, and then ask me if there is any cure for the shab."

Tom does so, and then Joe Dobbs says, in a very loud voice: "No cure for the shab! It will take all the food from here to London to fat them; and when you once get it, the sheep rub against the hurdles, and it gives it to the next flock."

Then Mr. Ramsbottom's customer walks away,

and Joe Dobbs and Tom Strong go to the Blue Boar to pay for their sheep.

"Anybody waiting for us?" inquires Mr. Dobbs of the landlady.

"Yes, sir, there's four gentlemen in the parlour; and if you please, what will you take for your luncheon?"

"What say you to a dozen devilled kidneys, Tom?"

"Do well," replied that gentleman.

"Just get us a dozen then, madam; and we shall be here in half-an-hour, for it is eleven o'clock, and I always get right clean away before twelve. Morning's the time for business, madam, and night for the warming-pan. Ha, ha, ha!" And Mr. Dobbs and Mr. Strong proceeded to the parlour, to pay away about eleven hundred pounds in bank-notes, for the sheep they had bought.

"Now, Tom, come and help us out. Come along, my boys" (to the drovers). "Have you fed the dogs, boys?"

"Yes, master."

And then Joe Dobbs, Tom Strong, and two trusty drovers and three dogs proceed to collect eight-hundred-and-nine sheep, and turn them adrift on the highroad for home.

How glad the poor sheep seem to get loose ; how they rush out, three and four at a time, through the partly-opened hurdle ; and how easily Joe Dobbs appears to count them, as they bound by him ; and then, he having said "Right" to the owner of each lot, the sheep are run into one flock and despatched.

"Go along afore them," says one drover to his tailless dog.

"Here, Bob, you and Jack keep behind them," says the other drover to his dogs ; and the massive flock proceeds as if by the entire direction of the dogs, whilst Joe Dobbs is instructing his drovers about the resting-places on the way home, the money for turnpikes, about calling for Mr. Lum's sheep, and where to leave some of the sheep on their way home.

"Ne'er a lame un, thank God!" says one drover. "You'll overtake we, master"—and he shuffles off after the sheep, which are already ahead with the dogs.

"Pretty good morning's work, Joe," says Tom, as they trotted along after the sheep, when they had done justice to the devilled kidneys. "Now I suppose you will put a shilling a-head on the six hundred?"

"I certainly puts a shilling on their head, and two on their tail, if they will carry it, Tom; but I've bought a thousand at this same fair before now. I couldn't find just the sheep I wanted, or I could have done with a few more to-day; but we must pull in here, for I promised to call to look at seven cows."

"Master ain't at home," said a boy; "but we 'spects un every minute, and I was to show you the cows. They are in the cow-stall."

"Go and fetch a halter, boy, to tie our horse to this gate, and then turn them out."

As the boy released the cows, Joe Dobbs said :

"Now, Tom, that's old Cockhorn, that's old Skim-milk, that's Thinchese, that's Fillpail, that's old Allcream, that's Kick-the-pail-over, and that's Ballafter."

"That ain't their names," said the boy.

"Then," replied Joe Dobbs, "you name them afresh, for that ought to be their names. There's your missis a-calling you, boy—run. Nice-looking woman, Tom ; looks more like making butter than the cows, Tom, eh?" And when the boy returned to say: "Please, you gents is to go indoors," both went.

"Well, ma'am, we can't stop any longer," said Joe, after partaking of refreshments ; "we must be getting along. I wish your husband's cows were as good as his brandy, and then we shouldn't be particular about half-an-hour." And then, in reply to the good lady's question, he said : "They would wet the other eye." And when they left, he commissioned her to tell her husband that he was very much surprised that a gentleman who was such a good judge of brandy, and such an

excellent judge of a lady, should not have a better lot of cows. "Tell him, madam, to send me an order to buy him two cows when I go to Leighton Buzzard again, and then you will know what it is to have a real cow about the place," and so saying, Tom Strong and Joe Dobbs drove away.

"Here they are, Tom," said Joe, as they came upon the sheep, after turning a corner of the road, and they pulled up and walked behind the sheep for awhile.

"One giddy one, master," observed the drover. "It's one of them two-tooth sheep, he's been bobbing about looking at the dogs all the way, until I told old Bob to ketch hold of him, and now he's gone forrerd. I shouldn't wonder if we has to kill him on the road."

"Don't kill him if you can anyway get him home, shepherd, or else it will be my loss instead of the farmer's; and you can call at the Green Man and finish up a leg of mutton that we shall leave there for you. You look after our

sheep and we'll look after you ;" and then Joe Dobbs and Tom Strong drove on to make a good hole in the roast leg of mutton that they had ordered.

After a goodly feast Joe Dobbs and Tom Strong paid the reckoning, when the former said : "And now, Tom, the best of friends must part. I'm going across the country to a cow-fair for to-morrow, and must be getting along, so I'll wish you good-day, and here's to our next meeting ; but in case you don't know the best way to run your two hundred sheep out of mine I'll tell you. After they have been shut up all night you let them all out in a large field, and they will draw off into companies, just like mates at a school, and then count them, and I'll eat my hat if they are not right to a sheep. Good-day, Tom"—and away drove Joe Dobbs, whilst Jack and his master came steadily on towards Stubble Farm.

"Hark, master !" said Jack, "there's somebody calling and looking back," he said ; it was Mr. Dobbs coming after them full gallop.

"Tom," said Joe, "I forgot to tell you, but there's a ewe, with two horns and a long tail, among my flock. You take her out and give her to that little boy of yours that was scalded, and tell him I hope that he will live to grow up and make a better man than his father. Good-day, Tom," and he was gone.

"Mr. Dobbs is a kind man," said Jack; "he gave me five shillings for doing his horse, and he never forgets nobody."

* * * * *

Little Ernest had progressed favourably during his father's absence, and a letter of condolence arrived also inviting Tom Strong and his wife to spend the following Sunday with Mr. William Strong, senior, so it was arranged that Harold should accompany his father. "But," said Mr. Strong, "father doesn't hold with Sunday travelling, so we must drive Betsy up on the Saturday night."

As they drove into the yard of Evergreen Farm on the Saturday in time for tea, Tom Strong's

father appeared, clad after the old-fashioned style, in his green smock-frock, to welcome them.

"How well the mare looks, Tom, my boy," said he. "We had Joe Dobbs here to-day, for I told him to send me half-a-dozen cows for my straw-yard, and he says they will be here to-night, and he told your mother and me how you won five pounds of that man, on the road to the fair. Just about pleased your mother, Tom. Come in, and bring the boy with you. Oh, here come the cows. Mother, take this boy. Tom, come and look at the cows." Having surveyed the cows Mr. Strong, senior, said: "They'll do, won't they, boy? Rare sort of cows. What a judge that man is. I always buy my own sheep, but I don't know much about buying cows, Tom. Now they will go into the upper farm, and lie in the straw-yard all the winter."

"And sha'n't you give them a few swedes, or a little oilcake?"

"Not a mouthful, Tom. Mine is the old-fashioned style. No expense, my boy. My

carter gives them a pitch or two of straw every day as he passes, and breaks the ice in the pond in the yard, and that's all they want. But come along in, Tom; the mare will be looked after, I'll be bound."

And then William Strong led the way into a large kitchen, with a brick flooring, and a wide fireplace, with dog-irons, and a chimney-corner on both sides.

"The little man has grown, Tom," said his mother, meaning Harold. "He tells me you are going to take him to London after Christmas to school. Do you think them fine ways and fine manners is any good for farmers? But there, perhaps you are going to make a lawyer of him; I shouldn't wonder?"

"Now look here, mother," said Tom, "it isn't my doing. You know I've got to go and give evidence in London for the squire, to stop this railway coming."

"Well, what of that, Tom?"

"Well, my wife thought it would be a good

chance to take the boy up to a school that she knows well."

"To make a stupid of him, I suppose," put in Mrs. Strong.

Mr. Strong, senior, was heard to sniff very audibly, and as this was always his habit preparatory to the delivery of some speech of importance, Mrs. Strong stopped speaking, and Mr. Strong, senior, as was expected, remarked: "Tom didn't come here because you should lecture him, mother. He came because I sent for him, and now he is here, I hope you'll make him comfortable."

"Of course I will, master, and the little man too, for all that. Here, my dear," said she, "give me your coat and hat, and here's a piece of cake for you, and you can go and sit in the chimney-corner." Mrs. Strong then tapped the window loudly, and Tom Strong looked up and began laughing.

"What's up now, father?" said Tom.

Mr. Strong, senior, sniffed again and said:

"Only the old game again, Tom. There's a great many out of work this winter, and, as you know, we farmers have to take it in turns to employ them and to give them a shilling a-day. I'm overseer, and that's that scamping Jack Rawlings. He won't do any work, and, if you sets him a job, all he'll do is to break the prong, so I make him carry the grindstone round here in front of the window and turn the handle (not that it does any good or harm, but it keeps him from being idle one day in the year), and when he stops, your mother taps the window. But there, missus," said he to Mrs. Strong, "open the window and give him his shilling and tell him to go, for I'll be bound he won't come here again this year. He's only fit for a soldier."

"Then," said Mrs. Strong, "I wish he'd take and go for a soldier, for he's a complete nuisance to the place."

"Tom, my boy, how are you off for sheep-keep?" inquired his father. "Joe Dobbs told

me you bought two hundred new sheep, and I'm thinking you will be overstocked. There's that bit of green round turnips on the hill. If you like to send the two hundred up I'll do them for you for a bit until you get room."

"That's just the thing, father," said Tom; "I'll send them up when they have got over the journey."

And then the party proceeded to take their tea on a long table down one side of the kitchen, whilst the farm-servants arranged themselves at another long table at the opposite side. Mrs. Strong first poured out the tea for her husband and family, and then put out the bread and bacon for the workmen, one of whom was the Tasker, a single man, who lived in the house and threshed corn all the year round in the barns, and who, in addition to his board wages, was paid twelve pounds a-year. When the meal was over, Mr. Strong, senior, drew his armchair up to the fire, where he sat in his smock-frock with a little dog in his lap, quite

the master of his position ; whilst his wife sat on the other side busy at needlework, and behind her sat the maid-servant, also fully engaged with her needle.

"Pretty dark this morning, Tasker !" remarked his master.

"Yes, master," replied the servant, "I couldn't see my hand before me, but I always lays a double row of sheaves all down the middle of the barn overnight, and then I know where they are ; but, 'pon my life, I had threshed 'em up and down twice this morning before I set eyes on one of them, 'twas so dark."

"How's that horse's heel to-night?" further inquired Mr. Strong of another servant.

"I think it's a little better, master. I've washed it well with soft soap, and it looks better ; I think after all 'tis a touch of the grease. What's the first job Monday morning, master?" And then the carter awaited his master's reply.

"We ought to send two teams to cart gravel

for the parish roads on Monday," said the farmer; "but if the weather's anyway open we will leave that job, and get that ground ploughed up behind the sheep."

"All right, master," replies the servant, and then having completed their meal, the men-servants all take themselves off into the adjoining room, the brew-house, where they sit before a good wood fire until bedtime.

And bedtime will not be long coming, for all have to rise at four A.M., and "early to bed, and early to rise," is one of William Strong's mottos. Indeed, he is rarely up after half-past eight o'clock himself, and nine o'clock never finds a light in any window at Evergreen Farm. But to-night, had you been a patient observer of the party, you would have seen the maid-servant whisper to her mistress and the mistress go quietly into the brew-house, where John Sherbot the head-carter was heard to say :

"Begging your pardon, missis, but we thought

maybe Master Thomas would sing a song or two to-night, and when he does, might we have the door open? and how about filling this can of beer again, missis, for we don't have Master Thomas very often now?"

"Well, Tom," says his father, "what about this trotting match? Joe Dobbs says the mare went like a flash of lightning."

"All very well, master," remarked Mrs. Strong, "but if Tom had *lost* the five pounds I don't suppose we should have heard anything about it. I don't agree with these fast ways, and fast trottings; better at home looking after your men, or conducting yourself steady when you do go out."

Mr. Strong, senior, sniffed again.

"Ah missis" he observes, "if Tom takes pattern by Joe Dobbs, he won't go far wrong. Joe's fond of a lark, but look at the business he does; he turns all his larks to account. Now, Tom, have you got a fresh song to sing your mother to-night?"

"The boy will sing you one first, mother," says her son.

"Now, Harold, come out of that chimney-corner, and sing about 'The Gay Cavalier.'"

Then the boy stands up and sings his little song, much to the admiration of his grandparents, and presently Tom Strong sings "The Oak and the Ivy," "My Ancestors were Englishmen," and "A Southerly Wind and a Cloudy Sky," midst the applause of his father and mother and the occupants of the brewhouse; and then the clock strikes nine, and William Strong shoots the little dog out of his lap and says:

"Bless me, Tom, I didn't think it was so late. Light the candles, missis," and the occupants of Evergreen Farm adjourn to their bedrooms.

Breakfast had been disposed of, the cattle had been visited, and William Strong's best coat had taken the place of his smock-frock. The Tasker has undertaken to see that the smoke-jack performs its office and turns the spit by

means of a long chain and a fan in the chimney, whilst the maid busies herself with the house-work. Mrs. Strong brings the Tasker his pint of beer and the potatoes to peel; and now she takes Harold's hand and leads him to church whilst Tom and his father follow behind. Mr. Strong, senior, is the churchwarden, and the women-folk curtsy as he passes, whilst the men all touch their hats as they hang round the porch of the church waiting, as it were, for his arrival.

And truly it is a funny old church, and no lack of sparrows chirping inside, whilst now and then the voice of a starling mingles with the chirp. The ivy, too, has appeared inside the church, and it forms quite a bower over Mr. Strong's high-panelled pew, and as the sun shines in at the window it reveals more than one perfect cobweb suspended between the ivy branches. Mr. Strong's family and about half-a-dozen more families luxuriate in a private pew, whilst the sexes of the rest of the congregation are divided, for

the men sit on one side, and the women on the other.

There is a gallery facing the pulpit, and in it are already assembled the singers, some of whom play the musical instruments that accompany the singers.

Joe Stride the pig-butcher is parish clerk, and he is perhaps the most important man amongst them, for he plays the large violoncello, which he is now tuning a little ; but he will soon come down from the gallery to his post under the reading-desk where he assists with the responses. Then there is Joe Heal who keeps the Greyhound public-house, he sings with the choir. Next to him sits Mr. Green the grocer, who plays the flute, and on his left Glanville the carpenter, who plays the bassoon, whilst Johnson the blacksmith plays the clarinet, and Bob Jones the bootmaker assists with the fiddle.

But now comes the clergyman, an old gentleman with silver-gray hair, and the morning

service proceeds in the usual manner. Harold is not tall enough to see over the top of the pew, and his father stands next to the door, whilst in front of the latter stands Mr. Allwright the farmer, a very stout man, leaning on the top of his pew-door. They are reading the Psalms, and there is Mr. Allwright's diminutive house-keeper, late, as usual, quietly unbolting the button of her master's pew to enter, but she has not noticed that he is leaning on the door, and when the button of the pew is unfastened the door flies open with her master's weight and knocks the poor woman against the opposite pew, whilst her master follows up the shock with the full weight of his body sideways. Tom Strong helps them in again, and the service proceeds.

But now they have come to the singing, and Joe Stride the clerk having given out the hymn, is proceeding to the gallery to play the violoncello. His voice is soon heard in the gallery as he says to one of the players:

"Tune her a little."

Then Mr. Green says to Mr. Jones :

"Give us a touch."

Then Joe remarks :

"That ain't right."

But at last the man with the clarinet gains confidence and makes a start, whilst his friend with the bassoon vigorously supports him. Joe Stride starts the singing, and away they all go, decidedly different ways, and perhaps the bassoon has the best of it ; but there is no lack of assistance from the female portion of the congregation and the singing is got through. And now the clergyman is about to change his dress, when Mr. Strong, senior, with a loud sniff, suddenly recollects something, and, midst the dead silence that prevails, he calls out "Joe."

"Yes, master," replies Joe Stride the clerk.

"Call a meeting !"

"When, master ?"

"Wednesday, at Joe Heal's, at the Greyhound, at three o'clock."

Joe Stride then calls aloud : "I gives notice that there will be a parish meeting at three o'clock on Wednesday next, and that Mr. Strong will be there."

This done, the clergyman, who has been waiting, gives his text : "A sower went forth to sow." And how simply and beautifully he explained to his congregation the meaning of the words. There was no high-flown language beyond the comprehension of his congregation, but a simple explication of the subject, showing how all were provided with seed to sow broadcast, and how all would have to give an account of their stewardship. His own, he said, was the largest portion of seed and the largest field for his operations, and he hoped that his dear brethren would help to relieve him of the truly fearful responsibility he was under to his Maker, for he felt that he could not fairly account for the talents he had received. Then again he would remind others that, although their whole time was not devoted to the sowing of seed, and

although they had, perhaps, little ground for their operations, nevertheless they all had the time and opportunity, by their example and their actions amidst their homes and associations, of sowing the good seed and tending it until harvest. Further, it was his congregation more particularly who had the opportunity of sowing amongst thorns, and might sunshine and blessing attend their efforts.

And then all went to their homes, and Mr. William Strong's little dog was found waiting in the church-porch for his master.

"So you don't take this dog to church, father?" said Tom.

"No, my boy; his mother always would go, you remember; when the bells began ringing, she wasn't happy until we were off; and one Sunday she went without us, and lay under the pew through the whole of the service."

And with a little exchange of civilities with their neighbours, the Strong party arrived at Evergreen Farm, where they found the Tasker

basting a large sparerib, and the maid just putting the finishing touch to the cloths on two long tables arranged on either side of the red-bricked kitchen—the one for the family, the other for the men-servants.

All dined at one time, and then Mr. Strong, senior, led the way to the front-parlour, which smelt rather damp, from its being used only on Sundays.

“What a pretty tree that is, grandpapa,” remarked Harold, as he looked into the old-fashioned front garden through the window.

“Yes, my boy,” replied the grandfather. “That’s the laureltinis; that’s the best flower in my garden; leastways I like it best, for it comes into full bloom when the frost and snow is on the ground. That’s the flower for me, eh, Tom? What time must you think about starting home, Tom? It’s very soon dark, and you’ve got the boy, and the roads are terrible slippery.”

“Well, father, I thought we would start about

four. I told the carter to bring the mare round at that time."

"Ah, well, that will leave nice time to get home. And now, missis, put us out a drop of home-made wine and some gin."

Four o'clock very soon comes, and then grand-mamma puts a little purse into Harold's hand with a sovereign in it, and tells him to be a good boy and learn all he can at school; and the visit is over, and Betsy soon lands her master and Harold at Stubble Farm.

CHAPTER IV.

The Christmas Dinner—Thomas Strong gives Evidence against the forthcoming Railway—Mr. Strong a Prisoner in London.

"PLEASE, sir, you're wanted," said the maid-servant to Mr. Thomas Strong, at four o'clock the day after his return. "It's a carter, who has come for some hay, and he says it is not half ready."

Tom Strong took his hat and a stout ground-ash stick, and went to the back-door of his house, where he found the hay-dealer's carter, who explained that he had come from the town for two tons of hay, and that one ton only was tied.

"And what does the hay-tier say?" inquired Mr. Strong.

"He is not there," replied the man. "His wife and child are there, but he has not been there for some hours, I am told."

"We will go and see about this," replied Mr. Strong, and he walked towards the stack-yard at his briskest pace. "Where's Tom Radford?" he inquired angrily of Mrs. Radford, who was twisting some hay-bands with the aid of her little boy.

"I don't know, sir," she replied.

"Then I'll tell you," said Mr. Strong. "He is up at that Red Bull, drinking that drugged beer that these brewers send out to country places. My table-ale isn't good enough for him, because it doesn't make him feel stupid, I suppose. Go and tell him to come here directly, or I'll get someone else to do his work. A drop of beer is all very well in its way, but when it makes a fool of a man he is better without it."

Mrs. Radford and Harry went to the Red

Bull, and as she was going into the tap-room she was confronted by Dick Reed the landlord, who stopped her and said :

"Here, where are you going to? I don't allow no women in my tap-room."

"I want a little hot water in this can to make a drop of tea," replied Mrs. Radford, at the same time producing a tin can.

"We don't keep no hot water for tea," replied Reed. "If you wants a drop of hot rum or brandy-and-water I will get it, but mine isn't a tea shop."

"Is Tom here?" asked Mrs. Radford.

"What have I to do with Tom?" replied Reed. "I'm sure he don't want you if he is."

"Look here," replied Mrs. Radford, who was by this time thoroughly roused, "such as you didn't ought to live. You will take the last penny a man has, and help him drink it, and you won't give his wife a drop of hot water. You don't care what misery you brings on a man's family so long as you can get his money; and money is

all you care for. There's your own poor wife that you've worked to death by looking after six children herself, a-doing all her own washing, and taking in mangling, besides minding this house whilst you have scraped enough to build a house with; and now she's gone to the hospital because you be that mean and won't pay a doctor. I'd like to limb such as you; and now I hope Tom will sit there and get drunk, and then there won't be any money for you. I never get any now; and I shan't trouble no more. Here's off home."

Tom Radford must have heard the altercation, for the moment his wife had left he ran the nearest way across the fields to Stubble Farm, where he found Farmer Strong waiting for him.

"What does this mean, Tom," said his master, "leaving your work in the daytime and going to publichouse? I heard it for certain that one day last week you went to the Red Bull ten times, and drank three pints standing each time; which made thirty pints of beer in one day."

"Well, master," said Radford, "if I did, I didn't ask you to pay for it. 'Tain't out of your pocket."

"I don't know so much about that. If you drink more than you earn, you must rob me or your family. But I tell you I'm not going to have such a drunken scamp about my place; and if you don't alter I must put you down dead, and then I must do without you. Here you can thatch ricks, kill pigs, shear sheep, tie hay, build ricks, and make hurdles, and you earn more money than any man on the farm, and yet you are always in rags."

"Look here, master," said Tom Radford, "I think I can live very well without you. I always did, and I daresay I always shall. Give me my money, and I'll go; for I won't do another stroke."

"You've only got a shilling to come," said his master, "for you had overdrawn one-and-sixpence last week; and now one ton of hay at half-a-crown leaves one shilling. Here it is; and now

get off my farm, you drunken scamp," and Tom Strong gave force to his words by poking Radford with his ash-stick.

"Don't you hit me!" said Tom Radford.

"Get off, I tell you!" replied the farmer, at the same time giving him another poke.

"Don't you hit me!" again said Tom.

Another strong poke with the stick was the only response, and by this time both had reached the boundary gate of the stack-yard leading to the highroad.

"Don't you hit me, I tell you," said Radford again.

"I'm not hitting you," replied Mr. Strong; but again he poked him.

"Then don't poke!" shouted Radford.

"You are outside now," said Mr. Strong, "and don't you ever set foot on my premises again, or I will hit you."

"If ever I do I'll give you leave to, old Tom Strong," said Radford. "Do your work yourself, for I'll do no more," and he swung his flaggen

basket on his shoulder and bade good-bye to Stubble Farm.

* * * * *

"Jemmy, you'll be late for church," said Harold on Christmas morning. "The four-wheel is waiting at the door, and papa will be out directly. They have all walked on but you and I."

"All right, Master Harold; it won't make much odds if I am left behind. It is only once in the year that I do go to church; and, for the matter of that, 'tain't so much the going to church as 'tis the doings at home, after all. But I'm ready directly I have put this white smock-frock on, and I only hope I shan't find nothing dead when I get back. Last Christmas Day there was a cow got a piece of swede stuck in her throat when I came home."

Gently Farmer Strong drove along to church, and as he pulled the pony up at the entrance of the village, he came upon ten men and six boys, all of whom wore white smock-frocks, and were going first to church and then to Stubble

Farm to dinner, which was always the rule on Christmas Day.

Mrs. Strong and Miss May had walked to church, and Miss May, who had been persuaded to leave Ernest at home, was very much frightened when the sexton called Mrs. Strong out during church-time, but Mrs. Strong soon came back to say that it was only the cook who had come for the key of the pantry, for she had forgotten to put the trussed turkey out to be roasted.

A goodly party of workmen they were who sat down to roast-beef and plum-pudding without stint; and their wives and families had not been forgotten, for a nice piece of beef had been sent to each home the day previous, and a large piece to Mrs. Radford, for Mrs. Strong said: "What had she to do with men's quarrels? If the man was out of work he would want it all the more; besides, hadn't Tom Radford worked at the farm all the year?"

When the boys couldn't possibly find room to stuff in another piece of plum-pudding, they went

to give the horses water and food, whilst the carters and day-labourers drew round the fire and sipped a goodly quantity of the best home-brewed ale; and, after drinking the "jolly good health" of the master and missis, and success to Stubble Farm, the party broke up and went quietly home.

* * * * *

Another year was now born, and indeed it was to be the most eventful one to Stubble Farm that had ever come. First and foremost there was that railway question, and to-morrow Tom Strong and Harold are off to London directly after breakfast. Every possible provision that can be required by a first-class school-boy has been made for Harold — several changes of linen, all marked with his name, several suits of clothes, three plum-cakes, six pots of jam, a basket of apples, three pounds for pocket-money, a packet of stamped envelopes addressed to his mother and placed in a pretty little writing-desk with every descrip-

tion of paper and writing material, and two new story books, in case the dear boy should be dull.

As they drove away, Mrs. Strong buried her head in her handkerchief and cried for a long time, for she loved that boy as fondly as it was possible for a mother to love a son, and she felt sure that he possessed extraordinary talent and ability. Betsy kept pace with the coach, although it changed horses twice; and before dark Master Harold Strong was safely deposited at Dr. Bolter's Grammar School, with one box for immediate requisites, and three more boxes of clothes, toys, and eatables to follow by coach.

Mr. Strong had no particular partiality for schoolmasters, in fact he said he always swore he would give his own a jolly good hiding when he grew up, only when he met the old man he took pity on him. So he simply ascertained that Harold was at the right place, and then took up his quarters at his hotel. At first there appeared to be some doubt as to Mr. Strong's getting a bed at the hotel, but, when the landlord

ascertained that Betsy and the gig were there, and, further, when Tom Strong threw down a five-pound note to pay for half-a-pint of port wine, the landlord became very polite, and chatted about the weather, and the coming trial of Proposed Railway versus Landed Proprietors. But on the following morning, when it was announced that Mr. Strong had appeared in the breakfast-room dressed in top-boots and knee-breeches, together with a green coat and bright buttons, every servant turned out to see Tom Strong and his long ground-ash stick march off to give evidence on behalf of his landlord. The people in the street too turned round to admire him, and when a party of boys collected, and some followed, whilst others pitchpoled on the pavement in front of him, he felt inclined to let them feel the weight of his ash-stick. At last quite a crowd collected, for, as Mr. Strong afterwards remarked at home, he "never saw such a lot of fools as those London people in his life; for the least thing out of the common, even what a

countryman wouldn't take notice of, collects a crowd. But," said he, "it's my belief that it's only a device of theirs to pick people's pockets;" and when, now, he put his hand into his tail-coat pocket and found that one of his best silk pocket-handkerchiefs had gone, and a flyman called out: "Do you want a fly, farmer?" he thought it best to avail himself of the driver's services, and, having directed the man to the best of his ability, he sat down in the fly and looked out of the window until he arrived at the House of Commons. Here he pays and dismisses the driver, and fortunately runs up against Squire Fairplay's steward, Mr. Gosty, and the day has commenced.

"We sha'n't be wanted before eleven o'clock," says Gosty, "so we had better get some luncheon. You must pluck up, Tom, when you are cross-questioned. Old man, what do you say to four-dozen oysters, and two or three bottles of stout?"

Tom said it would be the very thing: "For,"

said he, "I've never been in such a place before, and I daresay it will seem rather strange."

"Oh," said Gosty, "it will be all right, Tom, if you let them have it straight from the shoulder ; but mind you pay respect to the chairman. Never mind those other blokes, because if they can bamboozle you they will."

"Let us have one more bottle of stout," says Tom, "and then I shall be ready for them."

So the two walked to the house, and waited in the lobby outside the room of inquiry, until Mr. Fairplay's solicitor came for Gosty, and Strong was then left pacing the lobby amongst strangers. Presently the usher called for Thomas Strong, and, hastily hanging his hat on a peg in the lobby, Tom Strong grasped his ash-stick in his right hand and followed as directed.

His appearance created quite a sensation, for it was not every day that a gentleman in top-boots and green coat with brass

buttons appeared in that place, and many a nod, wink, and nudge went the round of the barristers; even the chairman took off his spectacles and eyed Mr. Strong as he was introduced. The chairman, however, quickly readjusted his spectacles, and, looking at Mr. Strong, he called to him :

“Put that stick down, sir.”

Mr. Strong could not for one moment imagine that such a command had reference to himself, and he looked round at the people in the seats behind him to see who was holding up a stick or otherwise committing himself, and again the chairman called out :

“Put that stick down, sir, I tell you.”

It was not until the usher came and told Mr. Strong that his lordship referred to the ash-stick that he was holding, that he realised his position. Then he turned very red in the face, and, twisting the stick violently, he made it round like an arch, and fixed it under the table, but not without noise.

Here a gentleman with a wig, and who afterwards cross-questioned Mr. Strong, rose from his seat and, addressing his lordship, said :

“My lord, I shall scarcely feel safe whilst interrogating this witness if he is to remain in the possession of such a pliable means of illustration as a ground-ash stick.”

At this the other barristers smiled, the audience tittered, the usher called out : “Silence !” and the chairman said in a deep voice : “Hand that stick to the usher.”

The witness then stooped to get the ash-stick, but in so doing nearly fell backwards ; but he recovered himself, seized the stick, and dragging it out again, pitched it somewhat suddenly to the usher, who, not expecting to receive it in that manner, caught it on his nose, instead of in his hand as Mr. Strong had expected he would do.

“Be careful, sir,” remarked the chairman ; and then another gentleman in a wig, equally foreign

to Mr. Strong, rose to examine him in favour of Squire Fairplay's case.

In answer to this gentleman's inquiries, Mr. Strong, having previously kissed the book, said: "That a railway would be ruination, not only to Squire Fairplay, but to the country; that the arches would undoubtedly fall in and block the rivers; that the cuttings would drain and permanently ruin the land through which they passed; that the embankments would swamp and flood other land; that the trains would kill all the game; that the trains would knock off the road coaches and abolish the breeding and value of horses; that the innkeepers and tradesmen would be all starved, and that the horses would run away at plough, and all the cattle jump out of the meadows, if they did not stroll on to the lines, enchanted, as all birds would be, by the light by night."

And then the little gentleman, who had first questioned the propriety of the ash-stick remaining

in his possession, rose to cross-question ; and whilst Tom Strong was thinking how well he had explained it all, and how nicely his evidence would read, and how it would please the squire, this little gentleman was just arranging his papers preparatory to his attack.

All the other barristers too put down their writing and commanded a view of Tom Strong, and they nudged one another as if to hint that something good was coming.

Mr. Strong was just thinking of inquiring if they wished to ask him any more questions ; in fact, he had beckoned to the usher, whose nose was stillbleeding, when the cross-questioning counsel attacked him.

"Now, Mr. Strong," said he, "will you be kind enough to look this way?"

Mr. Strong did so.

"You have," continued the counsel, "told his lordship and these gentlemen that a railway will ruin the land. Is your land light or heavy land?"

"Some light and some heavy, sir."

"Do you think draining improves heavy land?"

"Certainly."

"Is yours all drained?"

"No, I wish it was."

"Will you take this plan and point out the position of your wet land?"

Mr. Strong did so, but not without difficulty.

"Then the cutting will pass through a considerable portion of your wet springy land?"

"I suppose so."

"You say it will destroy all the game. Now let me ask you: Is the game yours or your landlord's?"

"The landlord's."

"You say it will make all the horses run away with the ploughs. Do you not expect to see ploughing done by steam very shortly?"

"You might as well ask me: 'Do I expect to see a cow jump over the moon?'" replied Mr. Strong.

"Yes," replied the counsel, "that is exactly what I am coming to. You say that your cows will all jump somewhere. Now are you aware that Mr. Stephenson has a herd of cows that lie on the very bank of a railway as the trains pass along?"

"No, sir."

"Now, sir," said the counsel, at the same time lifting his gown to his shoulder, tell me what is the staple commodity of your farm?"

"We can stable twenty horses," replied Mr. Strong.

"Have you no accommodation for asses?" inquired the counsel.

"Yes," said Tom Strong, "we have one and she wants a mate."

His lordship here remarked "that he failed to see to what point the evidence was drifting," when the counsel replied:

"My lord, we have gone from staple commodity to stable accommodation, from a horse to

an ass, and with your lordship's permission I will return to the commodity."

Here there was a general titter, his lordship was seen to make a grimace to suppress a smile, the usher shouted out "Silence, silence!" The counsel continued by saying to Mr. Strong :

"I mean, sir, what do you produce most of?"

"Dung," replied Tom Strong.

"I don't mean that, sir ; I am referring to produce. What seed do you make most money of?"

"Clover seed," replied the witness, and then the barrister twice repeated slowly, aloud :

"And you make most money of clover seed," whilst he looked over his notes to see what further question he could put to the witness.

"Now, sir," inquired the counsel, "we will suppose that this railway is made, and that you have been paid for the damage and inconvenience

caused to your crops and to your labour. What on earth difference can it make to the farming value of your land?"

"Why, Squire Fairplay may farm it himself," replied Mr. Strong, "for I sha'n't farm land with a thing like that running through the middle of it."

"You may stand down, sir," said the chairman to Tom Strong, after the barrister had seated himself, "and when you come into a committee-room again, leave your stick outside."

"Will you tell that man to return me my stick, my lord?" inquired Tom Strong.

"Return him his stick," said the chairman to the usher, and on receipt of that article Tom Strong left the committee-room.

Once in the lobby a new trouble was in store for him, for his best twenty-eight shilling black hat had been taken, and the only remaining hat was an inferior white one. After deliberating for some seconds, Tom Strong fitted on the white hat, and walking angrily again into

the room, he strode hastily towards the chairman with the white hat on.

"Hats off! Hats off!" shouted the usher; but having had one taste of the ash-stick, he decided not to arrest Tom's progress.

"What means this unseemly interruption?" inquired the chairman.

"No justice about it," replied Tom Strong; "someone has stolen my black hat whilst I was in here, and left me this old white one."

"Does it fit you?" inquired his lordship.

"Yes, it fits," replied Tom Strong.

"Then," said his lordship, "you will be able to tell your friends in the country that the extraordinary force of your argument, together with the weight of your evidence, has, during the temporary absence of your upper storey, unintentionally imparted an entirely different hue to the canopy of the case you have been seeking to cover. This, sir, is not the hat department; you must make your complaint to the constable at the entrance."

And again, this time amidst a general titter of all in the room, Tom Strong marched down the centre with his white hat on his head, whilst the usher called out: "Silence!"

The constables at the entrance were not so polite to Mr. Strong as he would have desired. One ventured to inquire why he had left his hat outside the room at all, following up his remarks by inquiring of Mr. Strong how many men he thought would be required to take charge of every man's hat that attended the committee; whilst another one winked at his fellow-officer and remarked that he thought Mr. Strong looked "uncommon well" in the white hat, and that it matched his other clothes better than "the black 'un."

It was not until Mr. Strong informed them that the chairman directed him to them that they took official note of the robbery. On receipt, however, of that information, they proceeded to take a description of the stolen hat, the maker's name, and Mr. Strong's

address, promising to write to him if they should recover the hat; and then Mr. Strong went in search of Mr. Gosty, but nowhere could he find that gentleman; and, feeling that his presence was a source of merriment and remark amongst the officials of the house, he hailed a cab and drove away to the residence of his father-in-law, Mr. James Dean, a retired tradesman.

"How do you do, Tom?" said Mr. Dean, as he shook him warmly by the hand. "Come in, my boy. We quite expected you, and have got a good dinner ready. And how have you left Hannah? And how are the children? And that poor little boy? What a dreadful case. And here's your mother. And I'll just go and get a couple of bottles of that best port up-town, and I'll be back in a minute or two."

"Why, bless me, Tom," said his mother-in-law, "you must have made those lawyers look about them; but it was too bad about the hat. Just like those hangers-on about the place. But

here's your father, and now I'll just go and see about the dinner, for you must be hungry. I rather fancy James thinks of going down with you ; but you must talk to him, Tom ; he looks poorly ; a change will do the poor old chap good, I'm sure it will, Tom."

"And now, Tom, what will you have before dinner?" inquired his host. "Shall we say just a speck of neat brandy, or a drop of gin-and-bitters?"

"Gin-and-bitters."

"All right, here you are. I'll have a drop with you, for I don't feel very hungry, and your mother-in-law has got a saddle of mutton and some currant jelly for dinner. We thought it would be a change for you, and we were not sure whether or not you would bring Mr. Gosty."

And then the saddle of mutton came on the table, and Tom Strong did justice to it, and between the helps he repeated the evidence given before the committee, amidst much merriment from Mr. and

Mrs. Dean ; and when he had finished, Mr. Dean said : " I tell you what it is, Tom. Those counsellors are all very well in their way, and very sharp, no doubt ; but suppose we took one of them down to Stubble Farm, and handed him a seedlip, I wonder how the corn would look when it came up. It strikes me that the evidence against him would be very strong. I don't dispute their ability to shear a client of his coat ; but the very best of them couldn't shear a sheep. I almost wonder you got off as well as you did. Their business is to read up the law, and then trade on the ignorance of others. No man gets good law, Tom, unless he is in a position to punish his lawyer if he misdirects him. But enough of them for to-day. Let us go and see the new piece at the theatre."

It was late when Mr. Strong returned to his hotel. He might have stayed at Mr. Dean's ; but there was no stabling there, and he was anxious to see Betsy well groomed, preparatory to her long journey on the morrow, and when

he did return, he had to ring the night-bell.

"Number forty-six, sir. Why, there's another gent there, sir," said the night-porter. "They thought you wouldn't come in to-night, sir, and we let your bed; but in case you came, I was to tell you there's a nice clean room, just newly done up, that you can occupy, and your things is all carried up there."

"One room's as good as another to me," replied Mr. Strong, as he followed the night-porter up the carpeted stairs, "so long as it's all clean."

"Oh, it's all beautiful and clean, I do assure you, sir. All new-papered and varnished too, sir. The men only finished the varnishing yesterday, and now we are going to use these rooms when we overflows, like; but don't make quite so much noise, if you can help it, sir, or you'll wake Number fourteen, and he's a regular tyrant."

Mr. Strong paused. "I can't help it," said

he, "there's no carpeting on this last lot of steps. And hang it, how much further are you going to take me? Suppose there's a fire, how am I going to get out?"

"No fear of that, I'm about all night, sir. We are going to carpet these other steps directly the varnish is dry. It's only up one more flight, and there you are. Very comfortable room, I assure you, sir."

Then Mr. Strong made another loud effort with his top-boots on, for he declined to take them off below, and he arrived at Number one.

"There, sir," said the night-porter triumphantly, as he opened the door of Number one and placed the candle on the table; "isn't that a nice room?"

"The room's all right," replied Mr. Strong; "but it smells uncommon of varnish. I don't much like it. Just give us a hand with these boots," and Mr. Strong sat on the bed whilst the night-porter pulled like a Trojan.

When he got the first boot off, he remarked: "Varnish is very healthy, sir;" but when he got

the second one off he went backwards with it, and made the crockery on the washstand rattle again. Mr. Strong gave him a shilling, which stopped his rubbing his pate; and then, with instructions that Mr. Strong would take breakfast at eight o'clock, he bade him good-night, and pulled to the newly-varnished door.

Mr. Strong slept very soundly, thanks to the port wine—otherwise it is extremely doubtful if he had closed his eyes, for the cabs rattled by every now and then on the stones below—and when he awoke it was half-past seven, so he dressed, and having gone through a process of ablution to rid himself of the smoke and dust he had collected, he repacked his carpet-bag and proceeded to open the door; but, alas! the door refused to open, for the catch, which should withdraw when the handle of the door was turned, was out of order, and had stuck with the varnish. Mr. Strong pulled, Mr. Strong swore, and he was about to kick the door when he remembered that he had no boots on. He then paused to con-

sider, when he saw a piece of blind-cord, which was tied to the bell. This he pulled violently, but without producing any effect, for during the repairs to the passage it had been disconnected. At last the cord broke, and Mr. Strong sat down on the bed to consider what should be done. He looked at the bedstead, to see if any part of it would come to pieces, but no; in the absence of the screw-wrench he could do nothing. Then he opened the window, and looked out into the foggy atmosphere and smoke. He was in the top bedroom, the only occupant of that floor, and without any possible means of escape or communication; neither could he see clearly anyone who was passing below. To say that Mr. Strong did not swear again would be to tell an untruth, and already half an hour had gone by without his being able to devise any means of escape. Mr. Strong jumped heavily on the floor, hoping thereby to attract the attention of the party below, but it hurt his feet. Then he shouted loudly out of the window, but the only reply was

the cry of the sweep or of the dustman; and then he sat down again on the bed to consider.

"I suppose," thought he, "this isn't one of their London dodges. I wonder whether I am in the right house." And then he examined the floor, to see if there was any trap-door in it, for he had heard of all sorts of things being carried on in London. Having satisfied himself that the floor was all right, he again looked out of the window, where he could just discern the heads of the passengers. And now he has thought of something, for see, he has seized one of the articles of furniture and dropped it out of the window; and crash it goes on the pavement at the foot of someone whose head had a narrow escape, and very soon there's a crowd outside, but they keep clear of the space where the broken fragments are lying. Mr. Strong is only afraid they will go away, so out goes one part of the soap-dish, and then the other part, and now the tooth-brush dish; and he is considering which shall be the next article when footsteps are heard coming up

the stairs. It is one of the waiters, who knocks at the door and calls out :

"What are you at, Number one? There is a crowd outside who says you are smashing the things. Boots has gone to tell the gove'nor, and he swears he'll have you locked up."

"What am I at, you fool?" replies Mr. Strong. "Open the door, I can't get out."

"No, nor you shan't get out till the gove'nor comes," says the waiter. "Here, come here, Boots, and hold on to this door-handle until the gove'nor comes. Oh, here comes the gove'nor."

"What has he been doing?" inquired the landlord.

"Throwing the furniture out of the window," replied the waiter.

"Open the door, sir," said the landlord.

"I can't open it, you fool," replied Mr. Strong; "the handle won't turn the catch, and the door is stuck; but if you don't precious soon let me out I'll chuck every mortal thing out into the street."

"Have patience, sir," replies the landlord.

"Patience be hanged!" said Mr. Strong. "If I hadn't thrown those things out I might have stopped here until goodness knows when. Now then, open it I say. Open the door, you fool."

But the opening was not such an easy matter. No tool would perform the office from the outside, and there was no means of access to the inside, and Mr. Strong had to remain a prisoner until a builder's ladder, which was fortunately raised to the roofing of some houses below, had, with great difficulty, been placed to the window, and then by means of the ladder a man came in at the window with a screwdriver and took off the lock.

Mr. Strong walked out in the most indignant manner at nine o'clock. He was met by the landlord, who said :

"I'm very sorry, sir ; but you should know that accidents will happen ; and you had no right to throw my property out of the window."

Mr. Strong shouted at the top of his voice :

“Where’s my boots ?”

The boots were brought and he put them on ; walked out into the yard, paid the ostler for the stabling of the mare, and bade him put her into the gig at once.

“Your breakfast is ready, sir,” said the waiter.

“Eat it yourself,” replied Mr. Strong.

The mare was brought round, and Mr. Strong seated himself in the gig preparatory to driving away, when the landlord came rushing out and called to the ostler not to let go of Betsy’s head, for Mr. Strong had not paid his bill.

“I’ll very soon pay it then,” said Mr. Strong ; and he struck the landlord a tremendous cut across the shoulders with his ash-stick, and calling out in his loudest voice : “Now, Betsy !” the mare plunged forward, and reared almost on to the top of the ostler, who released his hold, and Tom Strong galloped off, despite their efforts to restrain him.

"I wish," said Mr. Dean, "that you had stayed here as I suggested; but never mind, Tom, I'm going with you, and your mother-in-law has put up some nice tongue sandwiches, and you can make a meal of them, Tom; and we will stop at the first good hotel on the road where we can draw in."

So off they set on the road for Stubble Farm, and right merrily they laughed, when Tom remarked:

"You see, I didn't bring the ground-ash to London for nothing after all, Mr. Dean; I'll have a silver ferrule put on the old stick, just to keep it in remembrance of our London visit."

Never was better company, so-called, than Tom Strong and his father-in-law. The one boisterous, hasty, and strong, but good-natured; the other quiet, pleasing, thoughtful, and possessed of excellent judgment. He knew well how to restrain his son-in-law, and the son-

in-law valued his opinion and advice, although it did not always appear on the surface. And thus they entertained each other until, long before sunset, Betsy trotted to the home she loved best.

CHAPTER V.

Tug and Tickle, the Railway Contractors—Thomas Strong keeps Two Hundred Navvies at bay—Death of Tom Radford—The Board of Guardians.

MRS. STRONG was delighted to see her father, and it being understood that he would make a long stay, he became one of the family, and we must therefore treat him accordingly.

When Mr. Dean was alone with his daughter he said to her :

“ You know, my dear, I have wanted a change for some time, and when I heard that this railway was coming I knew how violent Tom would be sure to be, and I thought it best to come down and give him some good advice, for

depend upon it, there will be quite an upset when they begin to cut up your farm to make it."

And Mr. Dean was quite right in his surmises ; for, sure enough, the landlords lost their case, and it was decided to make the railway, and Messrs. Tug and Tickle, contractors, undertook the contract to make that portion of the railway which passed through Stubble Farm, near the homestead.

* * * * *

"Jack," said the farmer to his nagman, soon after his return, and whilst the latter was superintending the final touch to the comfort of Betsy, "have you had any rain here?"

"No, master."

"Then put the saddle on Woolly Boy, for he wants exercise, and ride round steadily, and tell all the men's wives to come bean-planting to-morrow, for 'tis time the beans were in."

Old Jemmy had but little time for his breakfast next day, for he had hardly swallowed his first cup of tea when the Nipper came to tell

him that six women were waiting for beans to go on planting with.

"Tell them to go on up into the field, and you put the donkey in the cart, and I will be there before they are ready," said James Wooten ; and, snatching up a bone and a piece of bread, James made a thumb-bit of it, swallowed another cup of tea and followed the boy. He soon measured up the beans and went jogging into the field where the women were waiting for him.

"Oh, here comes our dear Old Jemmy," remarked one of the women. "If it wasn't that my old man was alive, I think I should make up to Jemmy, bless his old 'art."

"Here," says Jemmy, "let me serve you first, for I don't want none of that gallus nonsense. Hold up your bag and take a peck of beans and get on planting ; drat such silly talk as that. Master says you're not to get dropping too many beans in one hole, and if he catches any of you burying the beans in the ditch this year,

he won't send you any beer. Last year some on ye shot a gallon of beans down one of the drains and drew the money for planting them, but I'm to tell you that there will be somebody on the watch to-day, so you had better look out."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Pocock, "that was the rats that carried them there; must have been."

But in truth Mrs. Pocock was the rat, for she had hidden a peck of beans in the drain-pipe with the intention that the rats should carry them away, and with the additional eightpence thus added to their day's work—for the women were paid fourpence per gallon for dibbling the beans in rows—they had all shared in an extra quantum of beer from the Red Bull, whilst Mr. Strong was the loser by a peck of beans and the eightpence he paid for the supposed planting of same.

When Jemmy had got fairly out of earshot, it was quite a struggle with the six women which should talk fastest, and truly their tongues

went faster than their dibbers, whilst they stooped with their dresses tied round with string to prevent the wind blowing them away, and at every step the mud accumulated on their boots, which were anything but compact or watertight.

"Well," said Mrs. Pocock, "so the railway's a comin', and thank God for't."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Radford, "and Tom's got 'is name down at Tug and Tickle's to go and teach the boys how to run the tip-trucks what's going to make the 'bankments, and he's to have five shillings a-day to start with."

"Well," said Mrs. Aton, "I only wish my old man was a bit younger, he shouldn't cut no more chaff in that barn for ten shillings a-week; but I'm afeard that railway job will only last a year or so, and if he leaves now our master won't take him back again, and then where will he get another reg'lar place?"

"My husband's a-going," said one of the barnmen's wives.

"And so's mine," repeated two other barnmen's wives in a breath. "They be all a-going to give notice next Saturday, and shouldn't I like to see old Tom Strong when they tells him, won't it be a spree? Just as if they're a-going to wop that straw about, for eleven shillings a-week, on a crust of bread and cheese and a honion, when they can 'ave four-and-sixpence a-day, and make enough overtime to buy beer, a-making this railway; but look out, here comes our master on his 'orse."

"Now, you women," said Mr. Strong, as he rode up to them, "don't drop too many beans in one hole, and keep your lines straight to-day, and don't get burying any beans, mind. If you want an extra half-pint of beer, have it, but none of your underhanded work."

"If it ain't taking no liberty," suggested Mrs. Pocock, "I should like to ask our master a favour."

"What is it?" inquired Mr. Strong.

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Pocock, at the same time

curtseying, "the wind do blow to-day, master, how about a little drop of gin in the beer?"

"All right," replied Mr. Strong, and he rode home and gave directions accordingly.

* * * * *

Squire Fairplay was so enraged at the overthrow of his opposition to the railway, that he went abroad for a season, leaving all arrangements to his agent, Mr. Gosty, and, when that gentleman had communicated to Mr. Strong, over the market-table after dinner on the following Saturday, the fact that all was signed, sealed, and delivered for the making of the railway, Tom Strong took an extra glass and drove Betsy home at her fastest pace.

Mr. Strong's workmen were already arranged outside the little room which Mr. Strong used as a pay-room, and after partaking of a hasty cup of tea Mr. Strong betook himself to his office, untied the bags of silver which he brought from the bank, and proceeded to pay his men.

"Horses all right?"

"Yes, master."

"Did you finish that ploughing?"

"Yes, master."

"Sheep all right?"

"Yes, master."

"How many more days will that field of swedes carry the sheep?"

"We shall want to move the hurdles 'bout Wednesday, master," and so on, were the remarks until the barhmen came in, and then they drew up as close to their earnings as Mr. Strong would advance them, and gave notice of leaving the next week.

Mr. Strong appeared astounded. "What, going to leave me with all this corn to thrash, after I've kept you on all through the worst of the winter? I call you a lot of scoundrels, and as to a week's notice, there's not another man of you shall enter my barns on Monday morning," were the words of Mr. Strong. And finally, when a strong young man, of twenty years of age, who had been assisting the shepherd, and

whose pay was seven shillings per week, gave notice that he was going on the railway, Mr Strong gave him a ride on his shoe from the office to the grass-plat, and then banged the door, locked his money in his bureau, and went out amongst his men to see if any more of them had anything to say: "For," said he, "I don't care a hang for any hang one of you."

Mr. Dean here presented himself, and called his son-in-law indoors under pretence of requiring his particular attention to some particular nothing, but in reality to stroke his ruffled feathers, and which he accomplished with some difficulty.

"Tom, my boy," said he, "I can foresee a great deal of good that is coming of this railway, and to you, if you will only have patience."

"Patience be hanged!" replied Mr. Strong. "Then why does the squire go away? He knows very well, and we all know that 'twill be the ruin of everybody. What's the good of growing corn if you can't get anybody to thresh it?"

"I wish," replied Mr. Dean, "that you had gone with Squire Fairplay, and left matters to me a bit."

"Me," replied his son-in-law, "I don't budge a peg, I mean to stand my ground like a man, and if anybody interferes with me I'll let 'em know it." And Mr. Strong very soon had occasion for his operations, for, before the next week had closed, Messrs. Tug and Tickle brought two hundred navvies through Mr. Strong's meadows, and commenced to turn the sods for the railway.

"Look here," said Mr. Strong, as he rode up to the party, "the next time you come to work here you go round the road and get on to your land from the road, and don't come across my meadows; I pay rent for this land, and am not going to have it all trampled down by you."

"You must go to Mr. Tug," replied one of the men. "He told us to come this way, and, if you interfere, we shall throw you into the river, old boy. Can you swim?"

"How do you like that, old Tom Strong?" shouted Tom Radford, who was amongst them.

"I tell you," said Mr. Strong, "that not another man will come that way," and he was going to say more, but a handful of mud was thrown into his mouth by one of the navvies, and, someone having also hit the horse with another piece, Mr. Strong thought it prudent to allow the animal to gallop off with him.

"Where's papa?" said little Ernest, "I want to kiss him before I go to bed."

"I think your papa's in his office," replied his mother. "You can wish him good-night as you go by."

Little Ernest knocked at his papa's door, but receiving no reply he peeped through the keyhole, just in time to see him ramming home two charges in his double-barrelled pistol, and having completed this task, he called to his boy: "Who is it?"

"I want to wish you good-night, papa," replied Ernest.

"You can't come in to-night, my boy," said his father. "Good-night, and God bless you! Don't forget to say your prayers;" and the little fellow trotted on to Miss May, whilst his father proceeded to load his double-barrelled gun, and then having taken off his velveteen shooting jacket, Mr. Strong hung it on the accustomed nail, put the loaded pistol in the right-hand pocket, a short stick loaded with lead in the other pocket, and stood the loaded double-barrelled gun by the side of it. He then washed his hands, brushed his hair, put on his evening coat, and joined the usual family party, but not a word was said about the navvies having thrown at him, and when Mr. Dean attempted to lead the conversation in that direction, Mr. Strong remarked: "I have marked out my course of action, and no power on earth will turn me from it."

Mr. Strong rose at his accustomed hour. It being a fine morning, he directed John Lingwood to take a load of white peas and the drill into the field, and to harrow the ground well, and

said he: "If those navvies don't kill me I'll be with you after breakfast to drill the white peas, for they can't be in too early, and maybe they will be grown in time to go to the London market by railway. But I'm determined that those navvies don't make a path across my meadows to make the railway. And I've got four charges here, and the but-end of the gun, and you mark my word, John Lingwood, they either go back this morning, or four of them will lie dead at yon gate, through which they must come; and if one of them throws at me, I'll shoot him as I would a dog."

"Don't shoot, if you can help it, master," said John Lingwood. "A man's life's soon gone, and 'tain't easy put right." But his master was gone on his determined mission.

As the daylight broke forth, it revealed Tom Strong standing at the gate of his meadow, at a narrow point where the stream and a very thick hedge formed the letter V, and as full two hundred men came to their work with

their picks and their shovels on their shoulders, they were suddenly confronted by the farmer, who held the gun in his left hand and the pistol in the right hand, whilst the muzzle of the loaded gun was suspended on the top of the gate. As they drew near to the gate, Tom Strong called out: "Stop!"

"What now?" said one of the navvies.

"It is this," replied Mr. Strong: "I am the tenant of this land. I will not have a road made across my farm. Yesterday you threw dirt in my face, and now, as true as God is in heaven, the first man that attempts to pass through this gate, I will put a bullet through his head. I have four charges here, and if any man throws at me, I'll shoot him as dead as a hammer. Now, come on if you like, but, by God, I mean it."

Then there was a shout and a roar, such as is rarely heard amongst civilised people, and most of the men searched for stones, but there were none; and then the men consulted as to

what they should do, when a large man, with black curly hair, somewhat older than the rest, addressed them as follows :

“Look here, mates. I told you yesterday not to throw at him. Now it won’t make above half-an-hour’s difference to us to go back, and we shall find plenty of ways to pay him in his own way. What’s the good of a man losing his life for a feller like him? He ain’t worth it.”

“No more he isn’t,” shouted another; “but we will be one with you, old feller,” and with a dreadful shout, with scowls, and the most fearful oaths that exasperated, ill-natured, low-lived men can utter, the two hundred men wheeled about and retraced their steps.

“Rather sharp work, Mr. Strong,” said a voice behind that gentleman, which he recognised as that of Jack Planting the under-gamekeeper. “I’ve been standing here sometime, but you didn’t hear me come. I’ve got four barrels here myself, and they would have gone off before I

should have seen you knocked about. I'm after two lurcher dogs that they have got. They killed several hares yesterday with them, and I've made up my mind to shoot the dogs, if I catch them coursing a hare. They didn't like to face those lumps of lead, Mr. Strong, and nothing short of that will stop them; but now they are gone round the road, I must go and hide behind yon pollard-tree, for I mean having those dogs. Good-morning, sir." And Jack Planting went his way.

"Oh, here you are, Tom," said Mr. Dean, as he came running round the corner in his slippers. "We heard the most fearful yells from those navvies, and I was afraid you were amongst them. What have you been doing, Tom? Do pray consider your wife and family, if you don't value your own life; and those dreadful fire-arms. Really, Tom, I thought you had more discretion."

"Discretion!" said Mr. Strong. "What's the good of talking about discretion to railway navvies?"

Mr. Dean sat very patiently during the delivery of this address, and before he replied he rang the bell, and on the appearance of the housemaid he inquired of Messrs. Tug and Tickle as to whether they would not take a little luncheon this cold morning. Mr. Tug looked at Mr. Tickle, and that gentleman having replied: "Just as you like," Mr. Tug said they would have no objection, and luncheon was ordered accordingly.

"Now, gentlemen," said Mr. Dean, "I have no doubt you imagined you were addressing Mr. Strong."

"Yes, we did," replied both gentlemen in a breath.

"Well," continued Mr. Dean, "I am rather pleased than otherwise that you have met me first, for I am Mr. Strong's father-in-law; and when you came in I was engaged in extracting the bullets from Mr. Strong's firearms, for I am fearful lest something dreadful should happen. You must know, gentlemen, that my son-in-law,

although one of the best of fellows, and I might say, 'a man after your own heart,' is nevertheless not to be driven; and pardon me for saying that I believe, had you first consulted with us about a passage through the meadows, the matter might have been arranged, but on Tom's going to remonstrate with the men they threw dirt into his mouth, and, now he is thoroughly roused, there may be some difficulty in getting him to relent. But I should advise an entirely different course to the one you have adopted."

"Where is Mr. Strong?" inquired Mr. Tug.

"He is in his field following his drill, but he will be at home shortly, for he said he should finish by half-past twelve, and it is now twelve."

"Has he got any horses to sell?" inquired Mr. Tickle. "We want eighty, and perhaps he might have one or two to sell."

"I cannot say," replied Mr. Dean, "but I think that, if you make that the introductory subject, you will be far more likely to get on with Tom Strong than if you say anything at all about the navvies

until you are on better terms. One thing I can tell you, and that is that he has the best team of horses that walks into the market-town. He is an excellent judge of a horse, and, if you like to stable your nag, I will walk with you into the field, where you will see them all at work, even his own nags."

Luncheon disposed of, the party proceeded to the field, and found Tom Strong just drilling the headlands, to make good his up-and-down journeys across the field, after which he had done.

"By George!" said Tickle, "they are some fine horses."

"We might go farther and fare worse," replied Mr. Tug.

"Mr. Strong's no bad judge of a horse," put in Mr. Dean; and by this time the drill came out at the head of the field, and Mr. Strong was at liberty.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," said he, as he wiped the honest sweat from his brow and put

on his coat. "Goes in well, doesn't it? Never saw a piece of peas go in better. If we can keep the rooks off them, and the slugs ain't too troublesome, there's plenty of condition underneath to bring a good crop."

Mr. Dean here came forward and explained that the gentlemen had come to see if Mr. Strong had any horses for sale.

"I'll sell them all," replied Mr. Strong, "for they tell me that when this railway comes there won't be any horses wanted."

"How many are there?" inquired Mr. Tickle.

"You can easily count, sir," said Mr. Strong. "There are four in the drill, nine in the harrows, and the two nag horses."

"What do you ask for the lot?" inquired Mr. Tug.

Mr. Strong laughed aloud, he thought it was a joke, but Mr. Tickle remarked :

"We are in earnest, sir ;" and then Mr. Strong looked inquiringly at Mr. Dean, for in the whole course of his life he had never sold more than

"No thank you, Tom. We will have the pony and four-wheel, for the mare moves too sprightly for me, unless you and your muscular arms are with us."

"Miss May," said Mr. Strong, "will you just take this glass of gin-and-water to Old Jemmy, in the kitchen? for I hear his dry cough; and tell him to rise early and feed the four colts with corn, for they will have a rough day of it. And, if you should be walking with Ernest to the village to-morrow, just look in at the blacksmith's and tell him to come with his strong son Fred in the afternoon, and shoe the four colts, for they are never so tired and so easily shod as after the first day's breaking in."

"Well, my lads," said Tom Strong, "have you all had your breakfasts? There's no hurry to-day. You can all four have a colt each and walk him about with his chains and his collar first, to get him used to his bit, and his blinkers, and braces; but no doubt the fine colts will

object. Let us catch them and see what they are made of. First remove all the cow-racks, for we must catch them one at a time, and whip him round on the dung, until he is quiet enough to let us put the collar over his head. Now, boys, are you ready? A drop of beer first, and then all keep them up whilst the black one is haltered, and then stick to his rope and make him run round. Wo, my pretty fellow! Wo, Drummer, for that's your new name. You've not yet earned a penny, but now your time's come. Now don't be sulky, my boy; get up. That's it; rear up again. Pull him over on his back when he does it again, my boys; it won't hurt on the straw, and will teach him a lesson. Why, you've changed from black to white, Drummer, and all of a tremble; and now, perhaps, you'll let us put the collar on, Drummer? That's it; and now the bridle. Ah, would you? No, don't strike with your foot; it's only the bit, my boy. And now, John, call your boy to touch him up with the whip, whilst you lead

him about and show him the village, and call him by his name, and pat him a bit, and we'll soon catch the next, and her name shall be Julia, for that's the name of an actress we saw on the stage, and her hair was bright chestnut like the colt we'll now catch."

And presently the last colt has been caught and run round, and the yard is all trodden into mud; and see, here comes Old Jemmy with a load of clean straw to place on the top, when down dashes the dog-cart with Messrs. Tickle and Tug, to see Strong about stabling.

"Go on, boy, he'll follow the other colt," cries Tom Strong to his ploughboy, as he shakes Tug by the hand, and says: "How do you do? See, I've tackled the colts, and we'll presently shoe them, and to-morrow they go one by one in their turn in the midst of a plough team with a halter on each side, and two men there to lead them, and an old horse there to draw them in case they lie down. But how about stabling? Let's know what you want, and I'll soon tell you what I can do."

"Very well—business," replied Mr. Tug. "The case is this, I must stable eighty horses hereabout. If we have to build stabling, as we first intended, it will cost us a lot of money; but if you will find us accommodation we will buy all the corn, hay, and straw they require of you, and you shall have all the manure; but mind, I put in one covenant, and that is, that we shall be always welcome to a glass of your home-brewed ale, and that you will do what you can for us, and when you want a cheque you can have it. And we want you to buy us some more horses."

"Agreed," cried Mr. Strong. "Your nine horses can remain in the best stable, and you can fit up this best barn if you will make my threshers come back and finish threshing the oats, which will do for you to go on with."

"They shall come to-morrow, Mr. Strong, or we won't employ them." And they did!

Then Messrs. Tug, Tickle, and Strong celebrated the bargain by tapping a couple of bottles

of Tom Strong's best port wine ; and after they had left, and Mr. Strong had partaken of dinner, I shall only tell you the truth if I say that Mr. Strong enjoyed forty winks in his armchair before the parlour fire.

"Cheque is all right, Tom," said his father-in-law, "and there's the blacksmith waiting for you to see him shoe the four colts."

"Tell him to come in here," said Mr. Strong, "and tell the girl to go and fetch John Lingwood in too."

"'Pon my word, I don't like to come in your best parlour with this dirty apron and clothes," said the blacksmith.

"Come in, I tell you, and you too, John," replied Mr. Strong. "My best parlour is for my best friends, and you two I consider are two of my best friends, for how could I get on without you? Now, blacksmith, I mean you to have a glass of brandy-and-water before you commence shoeing, and just take this out to your son and come back. John," said his master, "I have got

the money for the horses ; and here is a five-pound note for you, John, to put in your stocking, and you ought to get some from Tug and Tickle, for their men will get at least half-a-crown a horse out of me. I've got a lot to do for them, and, for a time, I shall leave the farm pretty much to you, John. Do the best you can."

"Yes, master," said John. "I think five pounds too much ; but I'll take care it shan't be no loss to you in the end ; and I'll just go and finish grooming the colts, for their hair is all of a mat, and you'll be out directly."

Then John went to his work, and Mr. Strong took note from the blacksmith of all the best young horses in the district : "For," said he, "I'm commissioned to buy for Tug and Tickle, and there is no one knows a sound horse near so well as the blacksmith who shoes him."

And a right job it was to shoe the four colts, as they plunged and they kicked at the blacksmith and men ; and the worst one was Julia, for she sent the blacksmith's son and his basket flying

against the cornbin, and was obliged to have her nose twisted with a stick and a cord (what the men called a twitch) before she would have her hind shoes nailed to her hoofs.

It was fine fun the next day to see the colts in the team; first they lay down in the furrow, and then Julia jumped on the back of old Blackbird and snapped her traces and bolted; but one by one they gave in, and when Tug and Tickle came again Tom Strong even agreed to find an extra team of three horses, to be paid by the day, to cart dirt for the railway. And now we find Mr. Strong, who gave evidence against the railway and foretold his own ruin, doing all that he can to aid Tug and Tickle, finding house-room and horses, supplying fodder and doing carting, thus filling his pockets; and when he walks down with the contractors, Tom Radford calls out:

“Three cheers for our old master!” to which all the hands reply heartily.

But we must leave him for a time, for he is off

to scour the county with Woolly Boy to find horses for Tug and Tickle.

* * * * *

Mrs. Hodge, who lived in the cottage next door to Mrs. Radford, was putting on her bonnet and shawl, whilst her husband, who had returned from Squire Fairplay's home-farm, and who had partaken of tea, was reading by the fireside. Looking up he inquired :

"And where are you going to now?"

"I am going to see Mrs. Radford," replied his wife. "She has just sent her little boy to say that she wants to speak to me."

"So you're going to leave your own family to spend your time with that dirty lot," replied Hodge. "I suppose you're going to send for some beer and drink it there?"

Mrs. Hodge, who had moved towards the door of her cottage, returned, and, placing one hand on the table, confronted her husband.

"Hodge," said she, "did you ever know me

go to Mrs. Radford's to drink beer? If I wanted beer I should send for it and drink it here."

"Not in my house," replied Hodge. "No beer comes in here."

"And yet," continued Mrs. Hodge, "you call yourself a temperate man—temperate as regards beer, but intemperate about everything else. I tell you what it is, Hodge, we were a deal happier before you took to this teetotal business, for since that time nothing nor nobody's been good enough for you, and it's scrape, scrape, scrape, save, save, save. Why, when we used to go out before, we were much happier, and you used to be sociable with your neighbours, but now nobody's good enough for you; and you're afraid to go here, and afraid to go there, for fear people should see you. I haven't patience with such nonsense, and I'm sure it wash't for what we either of us drank; and there was that poor Tom Radford, many's the time he would walk home with you instead of stopping at a publichouse, but now you won't speak to him.

I should like to know what good you teetotalers can do, sticking yourselves up above all your neighbours, and never going where you could do good by your example. Why can't you see that the publicans find people in tea and food, as well as in thick beer?"

"There, go if you like, only I don't see the fun of helping those that won't help themselves," replied Hodge.

"I mean to go, Hodge," said his wife; "and you can just see that that pot keeps boiling, or maybe you'll have no dinner to-morrow," and so saying Mrs. Hodge walked in to see what Mrs. Radford wanted.

Mrs. Radford was sitting over a miserable fire with her head buried in her lap, and Harry by her side, when Mrs. Hodge entered, and, looking up, she said: "Oh, I'm so glad you've come in, Mrs. Hodge, for I'm in a terrible way. Harry's been twice to the Red Bull, and Tom isn't there, and it's getting late, and I don't know what to do. What can have become of

Tom? Did your husband see him as he came home?"

"No, I'm sure he never saw him," said Mrs. Hodge, "but I'll go and ask him."

As Mrs. Hodge was going from one cottage to the other, she saw a cart and four men coming along the road, and as they caught sight of her the cart stopped, and one of the men came forward.

"Are you Mrs. Radford?" he inquired.

"No, I'm not, but she is in there. What do you want of her?"

"Oh, I'm glad there is someone here," the man replied; "maybe you will go and break the bad news to her. We've got Tom Radford in the cart—he is dead."

Mrs. Hodge clutched at the paling as she said: "No, I can't. Poor thing, what will she do? I can't do it—I can't."

"But you must," replied the man. "It's a woman's place to do these sad things, but don't tell her he's dead all at once."

"Oh mercy!" cried Mrs. Hodge. "How did it happen?"

"Why," said the man, "Tom was showing the boys how to run the tip-carts, and he didn't tip soon enough, and he went down, tip-truck and all, and it took us two hours to get him and the horse out. The truck and the clay went right on the top of Tom, and killed him outright; but you'd better say he's very much hurt, and not like to live."

And then Mrs. Hodge went trembling to the cottage again, and as she entered, Mrs. Radford said: "Why, what's the matter Mrs. Hodge, you look as pale as a ghost?"

Mrs. Hodge stammered out the words: "There's been an accident at the railway"—and in an instant, Mrs. Radford had rushed to the door, and, seeing Old Jemmy with Blackbird and the cart, she exclaimed: "He's dead, I know he is dead. I told him how 'twould be, but he would go, poor dear, poor dear!"—and she removed the sack that revealed the features of her dead

husband, as he lay on the straw in the cart. Scarcely knowing what she was doing, the poor woman helped to carry the lifeless body of her husband to the cottage, and then she lay down beside it, and mourned throughout the night, whilst poor little Harry cried himself to sleep in one corner of the room.

There was no money to buy a coffin, so the parish supplied it; and when Tom Radford was buried, Mrs. Radford borrowed a black shawl of Mrs. Hodge, and leading little Harry by the hand, she went to Stubble Farm to see Mr. Strong.

"Go round to the kitchen, and get you a meal of victuals, and I'll send Mrs. Strong to see you," said the farmer, for in truth he felt a pang at the sight of Tom Radford's widow and orphan; but Mrs. Strong did not require any instruction in the matter, for Mrs. Radford and her son had been fed, and the matter talked over long before the master again presented himself at his home.

"Tom," said his wife, "I've promised to

have Mrs. Radford occasionally as char-woman for a time—Mrs. Radley has gone out as monthly nurse—and can you find something for the boy to do?”

“Yes,” replied her husband, “tell him to go and keep the rooks off those peas; it will keep him out of mischief; besides, his one shilling and sixpence a-week will help buy a bit of bread. Didn’t you say there was a hamper to go by the coach to Harold? Is it packed?”

“Yes, it’s all packed, Tom, and I want a little silver to put in for pocket-money for the poor boy.”

Mr. Strong handed over his subscription, and then was glad to get out of the house under the pretext of sending for the hamper, but in reality to avoid a conversation about Tom Radford, who had worked for him for many years, and whose untimely death had caused him much sorrow.

Mrs. Radford disposed of nearly all her late husband’s tools and clothes to find food for

herself and child, whilst she made herself look respectable in some black clothes which Mrs. Strong had hunted out for her, and, when the Board of Guardians met, she presented herself as a pauper to seek relief from the parish.

Mr. Strong was guardian for the parish in which she lived; but his horse threw a shoe on his way thither, and delayed his arrival to give evidence before the other guardians as to the plausibility of the statements of those seeking relief.

In the meantime, as there were other parishes, the guardians proceeded with the business of the day.

Mr. Headstrong, a farmer, was guardian of the poor for the parish adjoining that one over which Mr. Strong sat, and his last case is now about to be heard, after which Mrs. Radford will be called forward. Mr. Headstrong is rather a peculiar gentleman in his way, much pitted with smallpox, his teeth very prominent, and a brow which reminds one of an alligator, inasmuch that his eyebrows appear to have a raised em-

bankment for their growth, whereas Mr. Headstrong's flat forehead takes a most decided receding fall towards his hair, as if shaped for a roofing of a house instead of that of a brain-holder. The man now before the board is an old road-scraper, sixty-five years of age, who has completely warped his body, knees, and feet, from the everlasting bending and drawing with the road-scraper. He is unable to bend himself upright, and has applied for parish relief. Mr. Headstrong has objected to his being allowed any relief at all, and he now addresses the guardians as follows :

"Ye see, gentlemen, this 'ere man 'e's bin for forty years in constant employ, as I knows on, and he's ollis had from eight to ten shillings a week reg'lar, and we thinks round our way as he ought to have put 'isself by summont, and very likely 'as; and now as 'e can't scrape the roads no longer, 'is son 'as got the job, and we thinks 'tis nothin' but right as the son should keep 'im, besides 'e's got two darters in service

wot ought to 'elp too, and he keeps a lag of ducks, gentlemen."

"But they don't lay, master," remarked the poor man.

"Then you 'as to find food for them," put in Mr. Headstrong, "and 'ow can you do that and then come 'ere and tell these gentlemen as you're without the means of support. No, gentlemen, I'm quite entirely of opinion as this is not a case for making our poor-rate any 'igher nur it is now."

Then the chairman struck off the application, and the poor old man took his bent body off.

Mrs. Radford was next called, and stated her case, after which Mr. Thomas Strong was called for, but in the absence of that gentleman Mr. Headstrong was requested to make his remarks as to the merits or demerits of the case.

"Well, gentlemen," remarked Mr. Headstrong, "I'm sure if I met the lady in the road I shouldn't take 'er for a person in distress; I'm sure we've got widders up our way with three

and four children wot gets along stunnin', and there's one on 'em sings a good 'un, and this woman has only got one child."

Mrs. Radford here curtseyed to the Board, and said: "If I could only have it for a short time, gentlemen, just till I get in the way of getting a living, it would help me; coming all so sudden I'm sure I don't know what to do," and then she cried bitterly.

The chairman looked towards Mr. Headstrong, who loudly sucked his teeth, which he always did whilst thinking, and then that gentleman further remarked:

"You see, gentlemen, the wust on 'em is, if ever they gets down on the list, we never gets 'em off again. I should like a loaf of bread and a shilling myself every week without paying for it, but you see 'twun't run to it, 'twun't." And then the guardians briefly conferred, and the chairman had addressed Mrs. Radford and had got as far as: "The guardians are very sorry that it is not in their power," when

in came Mr. Thomas Strong, and, bustling up to the Board, the chairman stopped and remarked : "Now Mr. Strong has arrived, gentlemen, I should like to know what he has to say about this case."

Mr. Strong then said : "It is a very sad case indeed, gentlemen ; and, I'm sorry to say it before Mrs. Radford, but her husband was a most improvident man, and he has left the woman with no end of his debts and difficulties. If the parish will allow her a little, my wife has promised to give her a little work, and others will do the same. Her husband was killed on the railway, and all the parish knows it, and the people are all willing she should have the allowance."

"I was remarking before you came, Mr. Strong," said Mr. Headstrong, "that she don't look like a person in distress."

Mrs. Radford, who had gained some confidence on the appearance of Mr. Strong, here said : "If you mean my clothes, sir, Mrs. Strong give me them, every one of them."

Then the guardian, who was previously about to refuse the application, granted Mrs. Radford one shilling and one loaf of bread per week, and the business was over.

As Mr. Headstrong left the hall the old road-scraper touched his cap to him, and said: "Beg your pardon, Mr. Headstrong, but there's that, thick hedgerow of yourn what runs down past my cottage—it wants grubbing, would you let me grub it and plant a few 'taters the first year, 'twould serve to keep me employed?"

"Can't say nothing at all about it 'ere, James," replied Mr. Headstrong. "It's a matter requires 'sideration, you must see me another time. But you tell your son just to get out to his work a little earlier of a morning. I was down by your house at six this morning and never saw nothing of 'im."

"'Taint light at that time yet, master," said the old road-scraper, and, as he said it, Mr. Strong, who was in the act of slipping a shilling into the hand of Mrs. Radford, called out :

"Where did you put your horse, Mr. Headstrong?" and the two guardians went to partake of a luncheon at the expense of the ratepayers.

"Never mind, missis," said the old road-scraper, "I've got a bit of bread in this 'ere handkerchief, and twopence to buy a pint of beer. You come along with me. You shall have half"—and the two paupers trudged off to the tap-room of the publichouse, where Mrs. Radford was able to supplement the meal, thanks to the shilling given to her by Mr. Strong.

"Ah!" said the old man, "this is a poor world for them as is poor; they wanted me to go into the workhouse, but I'd rather die than give up my little cottage, where I've lived for over thirty years, and if I did, why I must sell all as belonged to me and my poor old woman," and then the old man laid his head on the taproom-table and sobbed aloud. When he had recovered a little he continued:

"The few things I've got serves to remind

me of the poor old gal. Ah! she was a good wife. Besides, there's the trees I planted, and my little summer-house, and the ducks. What's all the world to a man when he 'ain't got nothing of his own, nor no home of his own? No, I'll brave it out. My George lives with me and he's a good son, and maybe I'll get a job of some sort."

And then, after someone kindly asked the old man to drink out of a quart cup and called for a toast, he brightened up, wiped his mouth, and said :

"Well, here's hoping that if there's any road-scraping in the next world, as old Headstrong will be scraper, and that I shall be road-surveyor, and then let him see what he can put by for old age, out of nine shillings a week."

CHAPTER VI.

Bird Starving—The Sheepfold and Lamb Language—The
Navvies, and the Gamekeepers.

LITTLE Harry, dressed in a pair of his late father's trousers, cut off at the knee and buttoned up underneath his arms, with two short pieces of string to act as braces, and with his own coat, a pair of his mother's old shoes, and a little tin half full of rice, went cheerfully to his task to keep the rooks off Farmer Strong's peas. As he shouted "Shoo-wo, shoo-wo, shoo all up, don't eat the poor man's corn up," and rattled the clappers which Old Jemmy had lent to him, the large black rooks with the glassy

feathers shining in the sunlight swarmed round and about him, and talked to one another in thorough rook language, and then they dived, one by one, close in front of his face, as if to have a nearer look at him, after which they all assembled in a large oak-tree and apparently had a consultation. At any rate, after they had been there some time two old rooks said "Caw, caw!" upon which given signal half the rooks settled in one corner of the field whilst the other half settled in the other corner, leaving little Harry in the middle of the field rattling his clapper and calling at his loudest. Then the rooks followed the drills with their long black bills, and swallowed the white peas as fast as they could unearth them. When Harry ran to one side that detachment flew into the tree, and when he ran to the other side they did likewise, for the first lot had settled on the peas, and so they kept the little fellow running and shouting until he was exhausted. At last night came and the rooks

took leave of Harry, who went home somewhat disconsolate. His mother had not returned from Stubble Farm, but when she did so she brought some scraps for Harry, and he told her of all his troubles.

"You must try and keep them off the peas, Harry," said his mother, as he was trudging off on the morrow, "for Farmer Strong will put the stick round you if he finds the rooks on;" so, when he looked back and saw Tib following, Harry caught her up and said:

"Come along, Tib, perhaps you'll frighten the rooks, for I can't."

And so far Harry was right; for the rooks, who took little or no notice of Harry and his bell, were scared at the sight of the cat, and left Harry in peace. Sitting on a sunny bank near the cover with the cat in his lap, little Harry, who had been up late waiting for his mother the night previous, dropped off to sleep. Not even the cry of the pheasant as it uttered the well-known spring call aroused him; but

Tib is more wakeful, and gently she steals from his lap into the cover to see where Mr. Pheasant is. Harry jumps from his sleep, for the most piercing cry has shot through his ears, and it comes from poor Tib, whose leg has been caught in a vermin-trap. Little Harry crawls down into the ditch and up the bank into the thick underwood, and there he finds the poor cat biting the iron trap and uttering the most dreadful cat-exclamations. He does not know what to do to release her, and whilst he hesitates his only chance is lost, for Suffield the gamekeeper walks up to him and says:

"Hulloa, my fine fellow, what do you do here?"

"Please, sir, that's my cat," says Harry.

"Your cat!" replies the gamekeeper, "take that," and a thick stick descends heavily on Harry's back, and before he can reply it has descended also on the head of poor struggling Tib, whose limbs now stretch and quiver in the struggles of death.

"Ah," says Suffield, as he puts his foot on the spring of the trap, and picks the dead cat up by the tail, "this is the cat I've been wanting for some time. She has been rather busy among the rabbits, I, do know, and last year she had three covies of partridges and two broods of pheasants that I do know of; and as to you, you young varmint, if I catch you in this cover again, I'll have you up before the squire, so mind."

"Oh, oh, oh!" said Harry, "do let me take her home to mother, sir. I don't know what to do, I don't. Oh dear, poor Tib!"

"Then," said Suffield, "I'll tell you what to do. You tell your mother as this cat's body is a-going to feed my ferrets, and her skin is a-going along with a lot more to help make me a nice rug to wrap round me when I'm out of a night a-watching for poachers; and tell her, if she sends forty cats up here, I'll trap every blessed one of them"—and so saying, Suffield tied a piece of string to Tib's hind legs, and, swinging her

over his shoulder, he lit his pipe, and walked off, heartless as a stone to little Harry's piteous supplication for the dead cat.

Ernest was now well enough to go out alone, and, hand-in-hand with his little sister, he was directed to take a little run before the sun went down. They are busy gathering the first sweet-smelling violets of the season, when their grandpapa overtakes them, and tells them to come along with him, for he is going to shoot at the rooks on the corn.

"Will that gun carry far, grandpapa?" inquires Ernest, as they come suddenly upon the pea-field from behind a thick hedge.

"Yes, my dear, I could put twenty shots into that old shuffle out there," replied the grandfather; "but see, it moves; it can't be—yes, it is alive"—and the old gentleman laughs aloud at poor little Harry, who stands crying for the loss of his cat.

"Why, it's little Harry!" exclaim the children, "and he's crying. Let us go and see what is

the matter with him," and they call him, and hear all about the cat.

"Never mind, Harry," says Ernest; "I'll give you a kitten; there's a nest of four in the cow-stall, and you can have which you like."

"No, my dear," said Mr. Dean, "people who have no proper place for a thing are better without it. The keeper will be sure to trap it. Here, my little man, here is a shilling for you, and now go and drive those rooks off yon corner, whilst we stoop in this ditch, and have a shot at them as they come over."

The poor rooks were thus taken by surprise, and, as they settled in the tree, Mr. Dean brought one of them to the ground with a cawk and a flutter, that quite frightened little Mary.

"Now, Ernest," said his grandpapa, "hold this gun upright—so—whilst I open the craw of the bird, to see what it has been eating."

And when the crop was opened, out rolled six of farmer Strong's white peas, twenty-three

grubs, nine caterpillar chrysalises, a large quantity of wireworms, and the rest common worms.

"There!" exclaimed Mr. Dean. "I always told Tom that rooks were the farmers' best friends, and I will never shoot another rook so long as I live."

That evening, when the tea was removed, Mr. Dean and his son-in-law had a discussion about rooks.

"I know," said Mr. Strong, "that rooks do good amongst the grass in the spring, when the slugs are about, for they feed their young almost entirely on insects; but see the harm they do at seed and harvest time."

"But, Tom," remarked Mr. Dean, "how can rooks do good in the spring, if you kill them in the winter? Why don't you farmers club together and feed the rooks in the parks and places during the winter? See what it would save you. Why should not rooks be treated with and controlled in the same way that you control your sheep?"

Mr. Strong laughed a good hearty laugh. "Well," said he, "I do like to hear you Londoners bring out something original! You might as well talk about keeping the hares in a cover, as confining rooks to the parks."

"But, Tom, what do the rooks live on, when it is a very hard winter?"

"Live on?" replied Mr. Strong, "why they live as best they can. When the ground is too hard for them to dig our corn up, they spread the dung-heaps by turning the dung over to see if there is any spilt corn amongst it; or they go to the sheep-troughs and eat the corn away from the sheep; but what they often do is to follow the sheep, and then about three of them will put their beaks together to turn over the shell of a swede, to see if there are any worms or grubs underneath it; but I have known them go right into the town in very hard weather, and look over the scavengers' sweepings."

"Then surely, Tom, if they do that, they would be glad to eat a little boiled lights or

oatmeal; and if they had food placed for them, say on the top of some hill, where they would not be disturbed, I feel quite sure you would not have half the trouble with them, and 'twould pay to protect them. But that poor little boy can't keep them off the peas, Tom," he says; "they take no notice of him."

"No, I know he can't," said Mr. Strong; "but I know who can. There's that old roadman out of work. I will send for him to-morrow, and let him have my old gun; nothing like a bit of powder for an old rook. They have most of them been tickled with shots in their time, and the sight of a gun is enough. Now his late master, Mr. Headstrong, is the man to talk to about feeding rooks in the winter. I should like to hear you two have a chat over the matter."

And thus the subject dropped for that evening; but the next morning Mr. Strong rode, before breakfast, to the old roadman's cottage, and he was delighted to come for a shilling a-day, to

keep the rooks off the peas, whilst little Harry was handed over to John Hills the shepherd, to help with the sheep.

"Dear me, how that shepherd does eat!" remarked Mrs. Strong that evening. "Why, the cook put the sparerib out for him to have his supper off it and I declare he has finished it, and we only had it in for dinner."

"Ah well," replied her husband, "he's about a-many hours. I know that he was in the sheepfold at four o'clock this morning, and he will be here until twelve to-night; besides, look at the hurdles he has to set! When the lambs are all down, there will be well-nigh a thousand sheep he has to look after, and only a strong chap and a boy to help him. I don't begrudge a man a good meal, so long as he looks after my interest."

"I'm reg'lar done this morning, master," said that servant, as Mr. Strong strolled round to the ewes-pen, at half-past six the next morning. "You come and look here," and he led his master

to the corner of the sheep-pen. "There, master," said the shepherd; "when I came this morning, there's them two ewes have got them five lambs, and they don't know theirselves which is which. E'er a one of the ewes will take to all of the lambs, and as they can't rear more than two lambs each, what am I to do with the odd lamb?"

"Oh, if it's nothing worse than that," said Mr. Strong, "we can soon settle it. Put the ewes in separate pens, with two lambs each, for a day or two, and let little Harry here breed up the other lamb with cow's milk. Old Jemmy has got a lamb's-bottle, with a cork and a quill in it, and the lamb will soon take to the bottle. How many lambs have you now, shepherd?"

"These five make one-hundred-and-thirty-five, master, with one-hundred-and-two mothers, so we have thirty-three double couples, and I have made a special pen for these thirty-three ewes, so that they may live a little better than the other ewes, as they have two lambs each to

keep. I think, master, that by the time the other hundred ewes have lambs, we shall have as many as two-hundred-and-fifty lambs, with the two hundred ewes. I'm not going to let them loose to-day, for the man is coming to cut the lambs' tails off, all but those which are only a day or two old. Shall I take the tails indoors, master?"

"No, John," replied his master. "Now just listen to me. Your missis won't have them in the house, and I should advise you not to let her know that the man is coming. You must get three bricks and make a fire out here, to heat the iron to sear their tail-stumps after the tail is cut off; here is two shillings to spend in getting some luncheon; you can do what you like with the tails, for your missis says it is very cruel to cut the lambs, when they are all going to be fatted in a few weeks. And I don't know myself that a long tail would make any difference to the lamb, only you see, shepherd, it is the fashion to cut them off, and they wouldn't look

like our lambs, with long tails; the London butchers know our mark and our lamb, and I don't believe they would make so much by shillings a-head, if they had long tails. But mind you sear the stumps well, for we had one bleed to death last year."

"All right, master. But, if you recollect, it was warm weather when we cut the last lot of tails off; but it is cold now, and they never hurt in cold weather."

So little Harry took charge of the smallest of the five lambs, which became his pet lamb, and nearly all the other little fellows lost their tails, which stopped their skipping and jumping for two days; but on the third day they forgot all about it, being allowed little creep-holes in the hurdles where they could go out into the swede field and crop the swede greens or run and play at their leisure. See, here come quite a hundred little smooth-coated fat lambs, with their funny large legs, and their bright eyes and smiling inquiring faces, to run and to gambol

on yon daisy bank. And what a game they have! one would think they were goats instead of lambs, to see them run up the bank in a body, like school children, and then jump over one another on their downward scamper. It seems scarcely possible that they will ever sober down into such quiet munching animals as their mothers. But now the game is over, and they are all going in to take a drop of beautiful warm milk, which is as white as cow's milk and much sweeter.

, And, reader, if you were not allowed to sleep until you had found out the lamb that belongs to each ewe, you would never rest again; yet Nature steps in, and, as the lambs again enter the fold, every little fellow says "Ma," and every "Ma" says "Ba," and then they run to their little bottle, and enjoy their luncheon. But stay, there is yet one peculiarity, for if a ewe has two lambs she will not allow No. 1 to refresh himself until No. 2 has arrived, but will bunt him away, until he too cries for his brother or sister to come,

and then looks at him or her as if to say: "Don't be so lazy; I am hungry."

What person, seeing a flock of sheep driven through a town, would believe that the shepherd knows every one of them, and every lamb that belongs to each ewe, and yet he does; and the writer himself has before now known quite half of a flock of two-hundred ewes by sight; but there are some sheep that are so much alike that it is only the fact of the shepherd being constantly with them that enables him to note some small mark of distinction. And then, to see the shepherd and his dog lying on a mossy bank with his sheep close around him, and the pet sheep, which wear the bells, tinkling them close to the dog, makes one wonder how it is they have no fear of the dog which flies at them and bites their legs at a word of command from his master; but you must know that the sheep know quite well from experience when they are doing wrong, and they know that the dog does not dare to bite them until he is told to do so. But

should you see a flock of sheep straying beyond their allotted boundary, and watch when you hear the shepherd call to his dog: "Go and fetch them back, Bob," you would notice the sheep scamper back long before the dog got to them; all anxious that they should not be the last, to have their legs pinched with Bob's teeth. Though in reality Bob does not bite very hard. And as proof of the non-poisonous nature of a healthy dog's teeth, the writer never knew of a case of a sheep dying or having a bad leg from the bite of a sheep-dog. Then see the sheep-dog, which has just called all the sheep to order, lying in amongst them in the fold. And the familiarity with law and order is only surpassed by the dog's discrimination between ewe and lamb at feeding-time; for when that time, or rather the time for the corn and chaff to be put in the troughs, arrives, you hear all the sheep bleat impatiently, and when the shepherd calls out: "Put them back, Bob," you see Bob drive all the sheep away from the troughs whilst the food is placed

therein, yet the watchful eye of Bob as he sits in the mud in the middle of the fold enables him to detect the lambs from the mothers; and, much to his credit, Bob allows all the little lambs to go past him and nibble and pick over what is being placed in the troughs, though not one of the ewes dares to pass the tailless sheep-dog until his master the shepherd calls out: "Come away, Bob;" and then see the ewes rush. And, if Bob didn't come away pretty quickly, they would knock him over, for it is the shepherd's word of command they obey. See too what tricks the lambs play with Bob; they jump over him, scamper round him, bunt him, and even jump on his back. When the writer sees a brutal drover kick or strike his poor dog, he feels inclined to return the compliment to the drover, for without his dog the man would be useless in his calling as a drover of cattle.

* * * * *

Tug and Tickle the contractors became constant visitors at Stubble Farm, and this

morning they bring news from the town—news of a very sad nature, for Mr. Robert Loveday's horses which horsed the mails have been all burnt in their stable, and they are telling Mr. Strong and his family how dreadfully the poor horses shrieked and groaned as they were being burned.

"Was there no chance of saving the poor creatures?" inquired Mrs. Strong.

"Yes," replied Mr. Tickle; "they got the doors open, but the horses were so frightened that they trembled and refused to move. No one had the good thought to blindfold them, or they might have rescued several of them by that means. As it was, all the forty horses were burnt, and Loveday is in a fearful way. Some say he was insured, and some say he was not. However, he says it will ruin him, and his cousin has given him one old white horse to start with, and I am going to allow him to horse a tip-cart at the other end of the working. He wishes to know if he may stable the horse at your upper farm."

"With all my heart," replied Mr. Strong;

"but here comes his son Bob—a resolute young dog. Ask him in, missis;" and very soon young Bob Loveday made one of the party. "It's no use crying over spilt milk, Bob," remarked Tom Strong. "It's a sad job, and I don't want to talk about it. You can stable your horse at my upper farm, and tell your father I will do what I can to supply him with fodder and so on; but there, I forgot, you are hay and corn merchants, so you won't require that."

"Thank you, sir," said Bob Loveday; "I'll go and tell father. It will save us taking the horse four miles a-day; father's at work with him now, for he can't bear to think of his troubles."

Mr. Robert Loveday was a man of iron type; powerful and muscular—equal to any navvy. He had battled with adversity until every line in his features seemed to defy its attempts to crush him; and with a thorough business knowledge and an iron constitution he worked like a navvy, and with the navvies, to draw the dirt from the

cutting to tip into the space for the embankment. Another horse was soon wanted for the tipping, and then another, and by the aid of some friends and his own persevering energy, together with the realisation of the remnants of his property, Robert Loveday managed to increase the number of horses as the work necessitated it, and, doing the greater part of the feeding himself, he soon filled the upper farm with his horses and men, and drew cheques for his work from the contractors.

His son Bob acted pretty much as his father's orderly, and, accompanied by a clever lurcher dog, he very soon became an eyesore to Suffield the gamekeeper.

Arrangements were now made with Mr. Strong to remove his cattle from the upper homestead, and to give it up to Robert Loveday, and a team of young horses at each farm was employed by Mr. Strong to draw out the manure, and to thoroughly dress the land on Stubble Farm, for the number of horses is fast increasing.

Mr. Strong, too, has been busy supplying

these horses to Tug and Tickle, and many's the fair where he and Joe Dobbs bartered and bought, until the horses which worked on Stubble Farm became quite a horse-dealer's stable, from which Tug and Tickle replenished their teams.

Suffield the gamekeeper was desperate, and Jack Planting, his subordinate, said to Mr. Strong : " Well, 'tis a foggy morning, sir, but I'm going down into the meadows to have one more try for those lurchers, or we shan't have a hare left on the estate."

As Jack Planting came on a bend in the meadow he found several navvies busy coursing the hares, and, calling to them to take the dogs up, and receiving no reply but a derisive yell, Jack levelled his gun and shot one of the dogs as it ran. To describe what followed would be to use language which cannot be written ; but with loaded pistol in his left hand, Jack Planting reloaded the second barrel of his gun, and then as deliberately shot the other dog.

The navvies swore they would be revenged, but Jack Planting walked backwards away from them with his gun still at his shoulder, until it was safe for him to leave them, whilst their dogs lay on the turf.

While this scene is being enacted at one end of Stubble Farm, Suffield is engaged in an altercation with Bob Loveday at the other end, and high words are being bandied about his lurcher dog, and Suffield has followed Bob Loveday into the upper homestead, where Loveday senior is busy with his horses, for it is too foggy to work to-day. Addressing him, Suffield says: "I tell you what, Loveday, if you don't tell your son to leave that dog at home, I shall inform the squire."

"I've nothing to do with it," replies Mr. Robert Loveday. "Settle your own quarrels; my business is railway work; if yours is game-keeping, you keep your game outside this yard, which belongs to me, and just get outside of this as soon as you can."

"I shall go when I like," replies Suffield; "and 'twill take a better man than you to put me out."

"Why," said Mr. Loveday, closing his fist, "if I was to hit you about three times I should kill you, but my boy can settle you. Go at him, Bob."

Bob Loveday did go at him, and Suffield was soon made aware that his study of boxing was most incomplete; and when he halted as if satisfied with the blows he had received, Bob Loveday seized him by the throat and by the clothes and literally pitched him over the railings of the yard.

The news of the two encounters soon spread, and a general consultation of the men with Bob Loveday took place; Dick Reed's faggot-pile was ransacked for sticks, and, when a goodly consumption of malt liquor had been effected, the men marched in a body, full four hundred strong, through the coverts and fields backwards and forwards, where they killed

every head of game they could lay hands on. Tom Strong was taken by surprise in the middle of the gang; but the men, who knew him better by this time, called out: "All right, old Farmer Strong, we don't want to hurt you, but we will kill every head of game on the farm."

It was a slaughter, for even the partridges were too frightened to fly, and many of them crouched in the grass and were picked up. Not a man amongst the navvies but had a good bag of game; and when Suffield rushed to tell the squire, who had now returned, the squire said: "You may thank your lucky star, Suffield, that you were not in the coverts, or they would have killed you. We must give up all hope of game until we get rid of these desperadoes."

* * * * *

Little Harry presented himself twice daily to Old Jemmy for a bottle of warm cow's milk for his pet lamb; and that little animal managed to consume quite three pints daily, besides an occasional treat granted to him by shepherd

Hills, in the shape of a "tuck-out" from some other lamb's natural bottle, in case that lamb was poorly, or not quite strong enough to take it all himself; but when Old Jemmy handed over the pint-and-a-half bottle to Harry, he never failed to accompany it with the usual caution: "Now, you young gallus, don't get drinking on't yourself." For Old Jemmy truly loved animals, and hated boys. Indeed, his staff of assistants might have been supplemented with another boy, but Jemmy believed too implicitly in the old adage that "One boy is a boy, two boys only half a boy, and three boys no boy at all." Indeed, it was exemplified daily at Stubble Farm, for when the shepherd-boy, Jemmy's Nipper, and one of the carter-boys got together, they invariably held a consultation as to what could be the next trick to play with Old Jemmy, instead of doing any work.

Harry would indeed have liked some of the new milk, for he had often only a little rice boiled in water¹ for his dinner, but his mother

had told him never to taste it, and he had obeyed her. When the weather was wet, which it was for days together occasionally, the rain ran off Harry's hat, down his back, and into his boots, which were already full of water, not being water-tight; and the fold-stakes, with which he carried the hurdles forward two and three at a time, made both his shoulders sore and raw from the blisters and friction; and shepherd Hills was not too kind to Harry, for, said he: "I could carry four hurdles when I was your size, and if you can't carry three and keep the hurdles forward for me to set them I won't have you along with me."

His mother dried his clothes as best she could, but sometimes a week passed without Harry finding himself in a dry suit. Nevertheless, when dinner-time came Harry nestled between the lamb and the sheep-dog in the movable sheep-house where the chaff and corn was kept for the sheep, and ate his bread-and-dripping, or what he could get, with an appetite and

relish that was surprising ; and sometimes Master Ernest and Miss Mary, as he called the farmer's children, came to see him and his pet lamb, which was allowed to have its tail long, and positively didn't seem any the worse for that indulgence, and they always brought Harry something to eat, in return for which Harry had usually something to show or to give them. Sometimes he had found a blackbird's nest with its four or five speckled eggs, and the party either took it and blew the yoke from the eggs, and strung them on a piece of hay, or they left them to have young ones. Sometimes Harry found them a little dormouse curled up in its round nest in a bush, with the entrance to the nest closed, and there, in its bed of soft hay and leaves, the little fellow had curled up for the winter and would allow even the birds to begin building and the may to blossom before he would come out of his winter's home, made with such care by himself, and both draught-proof and rain-proof.

It is not until Mr. Dormouse is thoroughly unpacked from his worsted-like hay-ball that he condescends to open his little black eyes, which shine like two new shoe-buttons, and then, unlike other mice, he does not try to scamper away, but allows you to make a pet of his little sandy self with his squirrel-like tail. And to one who hears a commotion at home, and the servant announces that it is the doctor come to attend three of the family suffering with bronchitis, or one who trudges to business through the fog ordering more coals on the way, it is almost a question whether the dormouse does not gain more than he loses by sleeping through our miserable English winter.

Then again, Harry, in his perambulations across the fields, has come upon several rabbit-stops. In case a casual reader does not fully understand the nature of wild rabbits, it will be as well to explain that the wild rabbit very rarely deposits its young in the holes in the banks and ground where rabbits are usually

found, but goes away into the middle of a large field—or if not exactly in the middle at any rate in the open part—and there it makes a hole about two yards underground, in which it tears off its own fleck, makes a warm bed, and therein deposits its little naked young ones, which roll up together in the warm fleck, and are as good as gold all day until their mother comes at night to feed them. So they turn night into day, and when their mother leaves them she covers the hole up so carefully that no entrance is left, and, by a casual observer, nothing would be suspected.

How convenient it would be to some poor washerwomen, if they could leave their children for twelve hours in this manner, and find the little things as good as little blind rabbits when they came home.

But Harry was a terrible torment to these little rabbits, for Farmer Strong said :

“Take all the rabbit-stops you can, my boy, for those navvies have killed nearly all the

game, and they would have killed the rabbits too, if it hadn't been for the holes."

And so Harry did not fail to hunt out the stops, which were, for the most part, near the furrows, and he always knew of several broods; but he has to stay his impatience to ascertain how many each brood contains (usually from five to nine), for Harry knows, that if he uncovers the earth to look at them, the mother will desert them and leave them to starve, for she is afraid of a trap being set for her, if she sees the earth moved. So he watches until he sees a tiny hole left open, and then he knows that the mother will soon take the little ones away, for then they can see, and are provided with fur, and this little hole is left to admit daylight, and to allow them to run out a little to eat the wheat, barley, or oats that is growing outside.

It is to one of these latter stops that Harry is now taking Ernest and Mary, and when they arrive at the stop, Harry shows them the little

hole, and says: "I know they are fit to take, for this hole has been open three days, and there's a sandy one amongst them, for I saw it out playing just now." So Harry went down on his knees, and inserting his hand, tore open the hole until it was too deep for him to pull out with his arm, and he now digs with the spade he has brought. "Now, I can see the fleck, Master Ernest," says Harry, "and you can have the little rabbits, for they are always large enough to live when they run out; bring your basket here," and Harry goes flat on his stomach, and thrusts his hand into the hole, but very soon he withdraws his hand with a shriek, for something has bitten his fingers, and the blood trickles down as he holds up his hand.

"Give me the spade, Master Ernest," says Harry, "and hold it to the hole whilst I fetch old Bob, for there's a hedgehog in there, I do believe."

Harry whistled and ran, and Bob soon came from the sheep-house, and scratched with much

violence, barking to get into the hole; and presently Bob makes a desperate rush, and a grab, and shaking something violently to prevent its biting him, he drops a large stoat on the ground, and walks backwards away from the dead bloodsucker, kecking all the while, as if the stoat had been most distasteful to him, and finally shaking his head, he trots off to his sheep-house, as if to say to the party: "If you have any more such disagreeable work, do it yourselves, for you will get no more assistance from Bob the sheep-dog."

Little Mary was quite frightened at the stoat; but Harry grubbed out seven little dead rabbits which had their blood all sucked, and then, burying them in the hole, they covered up the little grave, and carried off the stoat by the tail in triumph.

END OF VOL. I.



